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### December 2015 issue 360







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Photograph by Brent Darby. Styling by Ben Kendrick. For credits, see page 38





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# COUNTRY LIVING

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### FIRST WORDS FROM THE EDITOR



# The magic of Christmas...

is in the mystery – anticipating what might be encased in those beautifully wrapped presents, second-guessing the cracker mottos and pondering the perennial question: will there be snow? In this December issue of *Country Living*, we have everything you need for the perfect country Christmas, from our *Emporium* pages with themed present ideas for all the family (page 13) to recipes for the ultimate festive feast (page 142). There are garlands of greenery (page 56), gingerbread houses (page 88) and designs for the table (page 26). But we also bring you a few surprises: turn to page 66 for a charming church service with a difference, and to page 82 for a reminder of how different it was in Christmases past. And don't miss our feature on the four talented women who handcraft exquisite cards and decorations (page 73), including the gift tags shown below\* – find these and a wealth of festive inspiration in our General Store. On behalf of all the *Country Living* team, may I wish you a very merry Christmas!



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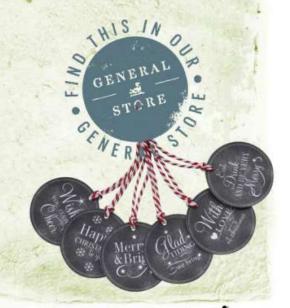


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# Country Living Christmas

Find the perfect presents for family and friends in our carefully curated collection of the useful and the beautiful

High-quality secateurs with a cushioned handle by Sarah Raven, £18.95, Country Living General Store

A variety of flower seeds in beautiful backets hith archie

Ceramics by Emma Bridgewater make a thoughtful gift - look out for her new Purple Veg design, from £34.95 for this jug

*Ideas for* GARDENERS

Hand-printed cotton napkins with original turnip and parsnip drawings by Norfolk-based illustrator Lottie Day, £27/set of six

RHS GREAT ARDENER Forty Gardening Icons and What They Teach Us

This fascinating book features profiles of 40 inspiring gardeners, from Gertrude Jekyll to Christopher Lloyd, £14.99, Octopus Books





ED BY **ALAINA BINKS.** RESEARCH BY **EMILY DAVIDSON.** PHOTOGRAPHS BY STUDIOS. PRICES AND AVAILABILITY CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

### GIFT GUIDE





# Make yourself at home

Layer together rich colours and inviting textures to welcome, warm and comfort

George large sofa in Brancaster Navy washed linen £1,975; Penelope velvet cushion in Fox £40; Fox velvet £40/metre; Smoke emulsion £34 for 2.5L; Somerton willow basket from £115; Kingswood throw £100













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### GIFT GUIDE





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# The Pinner Collection

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Pinner dining chair in blue £395 for a pair, Pinner round dining table in blue £975, shown with Adelaide pendant lights from £155.

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### GIFT GUIDE



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DECORATIVE DETAILS
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These simple decorations will introduce a charming handmade element. See page 40 for merchandise details.



For this jolly pudding, wrap a square  $(30\,\mathrm{cm}\,\mathrm{x}\,30\,\mathrm{cm})$  of fabric around a lightweight polystyrene ball (from craft shops) and tie off with twine, leaving excess for a hanging loop. Finish with a ribbon, then press a pin through the back of the ball so it hangs correctly.



Pass a needle threaded with strong cotton through several bright buttons and the middle of a concertina-folded ribbon – a striped design works well. Finish with more buttons and tie a knot at both ends to secure, then create a loop with the cotton for hanging.



Glue a sheet of wrapping paper to either side of a piece of fine card using spray mount. Create a shield-shaped template from another bit of card and place it on the paper-covered card. Draw round the template, then cut out the shape. Make a hole in the top with a hole punch and thread through a loop of fine ric rac to form a loop.



Cut out two triangles of fabric of equal size with pinking shears and place wrong sides together. Sew into a tree shape on the two long edges using a fine running stitch. Stuff the open triangle with kapok, then place a looped piece of ribbon into the centre of the open end and sew closed. Sew a loop of twine to the top.

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### MAKING AN ENTRANCE

Country Living special-edition Pashley bicycle in meadow green, £645, Country Living General Store. Evergreen star decoration, £29.99, Crocus. Merry Christmas sign, from £74.95, The Letteroom. Wool blankets (in bike basket, on stool, chair and crate), £30 each, Tartan Blanket Company. Pink paper decorations, from £3, Ikea. Coloured metal lanterns, £12.95 each, Dotcomgiftshop. Metallic tassell garland, £7.99, Pipii. Vintage stool and wheelbarrow, junk shop finds. Felt hat, £68, Anthropologie. Metal Fermob Montmartre chair, £282 (pair), La Maison Bleue. Folded blanket, as before. Colourful felt-ball wreath, £10. Paperchase. Golden Christmas tree print, £25 (unframed), One Must Dash. White paper ball decoration, £3, Ikea. Wreath, £46.99, Crocus. Vintage crates, £26 each, Hen & Hammock. Folded tablecloth in Lambada cream/red cotton, £35/m, Jane Churchill



### PERFECT PRESENTS Westfire Uniq 35 stove, £1,119,

Stoves Are Us. Marshmallow toasting fork, £30, Amazon. Norfolk fire pipe, £45, The Carrier Company. Esparto grass basket (just seen), from a selection, Etsy. Vintage metal bucket, £38, Hen & Hammock. Poste coffee table, £245, Loaf. On table, from left China cup, £14, Anthropologie. Soapstone bowl, from a selection, Canvas Home. Vintage glass bottles, from a selection, Pimpernel & Partners. Pale wooden candlesticks, from £43 each. The Conran Shop. Gold dinner candles, from a selection, St Eval. Handprinted Christmas card (just seen), £2.50, Cambridge Imprint. Vintage dog-on-wheels toy, £110, The Mint List (wrapped). Pink and white striped wrapping paper, £7.95/roll, The Conran Shop. Ribbons, from a selection, Jane Means. Floral wrapping paper, £12.99 (12 assorted sheets), Pimpernel Press. Geometric wrapping paper, £2.50/sheet, Cambridge Imprint. Green striped rosette decoration, £2.50, Paperchase. Red-andwhite striped paper bags, £2.49 (pack of 20), Pipii. Christmas gift tags, from a selection, Dotcomgiftshop. Gower three-seater corner sofa in Racing plain fabric, £2,298, Country Living Collection exclusively available at DFS. On sofa, from left Cushions made from vintage fabrics, from a selection, Donna Flower. Super-soft wool throw, £75, French Connection. Coloured folding paper decorations (on window), £20 (set of three), The Conran Shop. On floor Kalahari rug, £255, Northwood. Crate, £26, Hen & Hammock. Gold pears wrapping paper, £2.20/sheet, Caroline Gardner. All other wrapping papers,

as before



### **BRIGHT & BEAUTIFUL**

Tongue-and-groove-panelled walls and ceiling in Grey Steel 2 eggshell, £15.99/750ml, Dulux. Armchair, from a selection, The Conran Shop. Cushions in vintage floral fabrics, from a selection, Donna Flower. Esparto grass basket, from a selection, Etsy. Vintage metal bucket, £38, Hen & Hammock. On raised hearth Woven bowl, £40, French Connection. Lamp made from vintage glass bottle, from £120, Spoon & Co; shade covered in Ottoman Slate cotton, £38, Tinsmiths. Striped paper bag, £2.49 (pack of 20), Pipii. Floral wrapping paper, £12.99 (12 assorted sheets), Pimpernel Press. Wooden crate, £26. Hen & Hammock. Westfire Uniq 35 stove, £1,119, Stoves Are Us. Marshmallow toasting fork, £30, Amazon. Norfolk fire pipe, £45, The Carrier Company. Vintage-style clock, from a selection, Newgate. Gower three-seater corner sofa in Racing plain fabric, £2,298, **Country Living Collection** exclusively available at dfs. On sofa, from left Cushions made from vintage fabrics, from a selection. Donna Flower. Mustard and white knitted wool cushions, from £60, Lauren Aston. Super-soft wool throw, £75, French Connection. Kalahari rug, £255, Northwood. Poste coffee table, £245, Loaf. On table, from left Bone-china mugs, £14 each, Freight Store. Copper star sweet tray, £10.50; galvanised metal jug, £6.50: both Cox & Cox. Frosted pine cone candle, £11.95, Nordic House. Stoneware bowl, from a selection, Canvas Home. Purple glass bottle, £16, French Connection. Geometric wrapping paper, £2.50/sheet;

handprinted Merry Christmas

card, £2.50: all Cambridge Imprint. Under Christmas tree Gold pears wrapping paper, £2.20/sheet, Caroline Gardner. Striped wrapping paper, £7.95/roll, The Conran Shop. Floral wrapping paper, £12.99 (12 assorted sheets), Pimpernel Press. Ribbons, from a selection, Jane Means. Green striped rosette decoration, £2.50, Paperchase. Vintage wooden crates, £26 each, Hen & Hammock. On tree Gold-flecked paper star (tree-topper) by Ferm Living, £23.85. Smallable. Glass toadstools, £6.95 (set of six); vintage-style patterned baubles, £19.95 (set of 12): both Dotcomgiftshop. Large multi-coloured folding paper balls, £20 (set of three), The Conran Shop. Wooden seagulls, £5.95 each; fabric dachshunds, £25 each; wooden donkeys, £5.95 each; wooden sewing-machines, £5.95: all Poppy Treffry. Red-and-white glossy baubles, £15 (set of three), Broste. Metal tree candle clips, £10 (set of ten): beeswax tree candles. £5 (pair): both Freight Store. Faux pomegranate clusters, £2.75 (pair), Pipii. Crackers with neon details by Meri Meri, £17.50 (box of six), Berry Red. All other handmade decorations, see



previous page for instructions

### SETTING THE SCENE

Metal Fermob Montmartre chairs, £282 (pair), La Maison Bleue. Tartan wool blankets, £30 each, Tartan Blanket Company. Wooden table, •







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similar from The Conran Shop. On table, from left Tablecloth in Lambada cream/red (J780F-16) cotton, £35/m, Jane Churchill. Ribbed lustre tea lights, £14.90 (three), Hen & Hammock. Multicoloured tea-light holders, £40 (set of eight), The Contemporary Home. White mug, £14, Freight Store. Gold straws, £4.50 (24), Berry Red. Paper decorations, from £3 each, Ikea. Aqua Seagate plates, £17 each; Madrid cutlery, £71.50 (five-piece set): all Canvas Home. Father Christmas gift bags, £11 (parcel set), Pipii. Crackers, from a selection, Paperchase. Faux-pine garland, £40; frosted pine cones, £20 (bag of 20); Hanley candlestick (in centre), £25: all Neptune. Wooden candlesticks, £43 each; linen napkins, from £6.95 each; wine glasses, £24 (pair): all The Conran Shop. Gold candles, from a selection, St Eval. Framed bauble picture, £119, Art.co.uk. Pre-lit artificial tree, from £99, Balsam Hill. Vintage crate, £26, Hen & Hammock. Wrapping papers, from a selection, Pimpernel Press and Cambridge Imprint



### SEASON'S GREETINGS

Handmade lamp, from £120, Spoon & Co; shade in Ottoman Slate cotton, £38/m, Tinsmiths. Porcelain tea-light holders, £40 (set of eight); glass jar with illuminated Santa scene, £12: both The Contemporary Home. Partridge, robin and dove cards, from a selection, Oxfam. Fold-out woodland animals card, £4.50, Rastall & Daughters. Other handprinted cards, £2.50

each, Cambridge Imprint, Mini light-up brush trees, £12.50 (for two), Cox & Cox. Large evergreen handmade star decoration, £29.99, Crocus. Wooden candlestick, £43, The Conran Shop. Gold candle, from a selection, St Eval. Vintage metal bucket, £38, Hen & Hammock



### TABLE DETAIL

Red glass (just seen), £6.95; wooden candlesticks, £43 each; linen napkins, from £6.95 each: all The Conran Shop. Gold dinner candles, from a selection, St Eval. Folding pink paper decorations, from £3 each, Ikea. Multi-coloured tea-light holders, £40 (set of eight), The Contemporary Home. Ribbedglass lustre tea lights, £14.90 (set of three), Hen & Hammock. Bone-china mug, £14, Freight Store. Gold straws, £4.50 (for 24), Berry Red. Faux pine garland, £40; frosted pine cones, £20 (20): both Neptune. Aqua Seagate plate, £17; Madrid cutlery, £71.50 (fivepiece set): both Canvas Home



### FESTIVE WREATH

Wreath base, from £10.50, Og Home. Vintage baubles, from £6, ebay. Glass figure baubles, from £8, Dotcomgiftshop. Ribbons, from a selection, Jane Means. Paper decoration, from £3, Ikea. Wrapping paper, £2.50/sheet, Cambridge Imprint. Artificial tree, from £99, Balsam Hill. Chair, £282 (pair), La Maison Bleue. Night lights, from a selection, The Contemporary Home. Hanley candlestick, £25, Neptune. Pillar candle, from £8, St Eval



### HANDMADE DECORATIONS

All ribbons, twine and ric rac, from a selection, Jane Means. Christmas pudding decoration Polystyrene ball, £2 (for three), Hobbycraft. Lambada cream/ red (J780F-16) cotton, £35/m, Jane Churchill. Ribbon decoration Buttons, £3 (300g), Hobbycraft. Christmas tree decoration Twinkle (J805F-02) cotton, £34/m, Jane Churchill. Shield decoration Wrapping papers, 95p/sheet, Paperchase. Vintage wooden crate, £26, Hen & Hammock



### PLATE DETAIL

Tablecloth in Lambada cream/ red (J780F-16) cotton, £35/m, Jane Churchill. Agua Seagate plate, £17; Madrid cutlery, £71.50 (five-piece set): both Canvas Home. Father Christmas gift bag, £11 (parcel set), Pipii. Crackers, £13 (box of six), Paperchase. Linen napkin, from £6.95, The Conran Shop. Paper decoration, tea-light holders, mug and straws, as before



### FUN AND GAMES!

Papier-mâché ram's head, £48, Anthropologie. Artworks, from a selection, Paperchase. Painted single bed, similar £897, Scumble Goosie. Bed linen, from a selection, The Linen Press. Blanket, £30, Tartan Blanket Company. Clothes, from a selection, Seasalt. Stocking in red cotton, £22/m, Harlequin; cuff in Hares red (J804F-01) cotton, £34/m, Jane Churchill. Bedside table, junk-shop find. Lamp, from £120, Spoon & Co; map shade, £24, ebay. Sack in Jura striped peony velvet, £39.50/m, lan

Mankin; cuff in red cotton, from £22/m, Harlequin. Giant cracker, £20 (with 20 individual crackers inside), John Lewis. Wrapping papers, from a selection. Pimpernel Press and Cambridge Imprint. Ribbons, from £2/m, Jane Means. Rug, similar from John Lewis. Paper sack, £12, Betsy Benn. Bespoke teddy, from £450, Steiff

n For stockist details, see Where to Buy

### CHESNEY'S



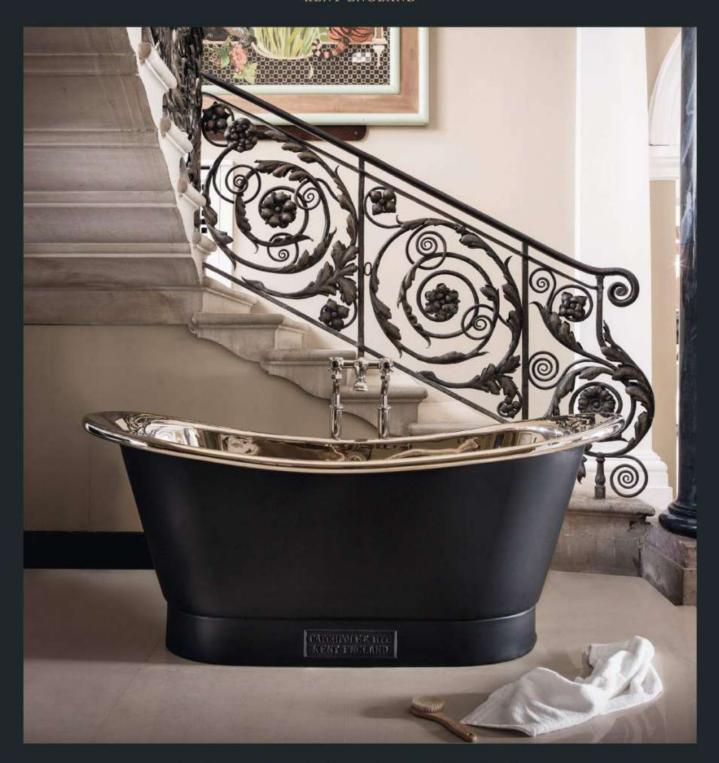
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# COLUMN WHAT TO SEE December



### A PARTRIDGE IN A PEAR TREE

o rousing chorus of Christmas carols would be complete without mention of / this festive bird and its choice of perch. The lyrics to The Twelve Days of Christmas were first published in 1780 in a children's book but the tune was added in 1909, based on an arrangement of a traditional folk melody. What the grounddwelling grey partridge (Perdix perdix) was doing up in a pear tree has spawned various theories: some believe the words were originally a catechism song for 16th-century Catholics unable to practise their faith publicly and that the bird in the tree represented Christ on the cross. A more commonly held opinion is that the line is a result of the song's Gaelic origins. At one stage it would have included both the English and French words for a partridge, 'A partridge, une perdrix' and only over time, as an understanding of French diminished, did it become the simpler, if less likely, 'partridge in a pear tree'.



# THERE'S NO LET-UP IN DECEMBER. As well as the winter cycle of providing food and bedding for the cattle and pigs, we're also trying to get the boring but important jobs such as fencing, ditching and repairing farm machinery done. And there's grain to go to the flour millers, too, on huge lorries. Preparing for Christmas is a major

### DOWN ON THE FARM Helen Browning reveals what is taking place on her mixed organic holding in Wiltshire

job in itself; everyone wants time off, but even on 25 December we need five people working. We have a rota that tries to ensure staff get a lie-in at least every other year, and those who do work will enjoy time off at New Year. Disasters such as the water system breaking down always seem to happen on Christmas Day – but



we still manage to fit in some time to celebrate. For more about Helen's farm, see helenbrounings organic.co.uk.



### AS WE SPEND OUR **EVENINGS** cosily indoors during the shortest days of the year, the fox - that most widespread and versatile of predators - is turning his mind to things romantic. When advertising his presence and intention to mate, a dog fox makes a distinctive Wow-wowwow' barking call. This sound can be mimicked by the human voice

### IN NATURE Naturalist Simon King offers tips about the wild visitors you will see in your garden

and may bring your local dog fox trotting up to find out who the intruder is, or a vixen to see whether she fancies you or not. You can also identify a vulpine presence by its droppings, or scat, which resemble that of a medium-sized dog (with a more tapering form), as well as scent marking, detectable to the human nose due to its distinctive



odour of sweet aniseed mixed with wet hay. To learn about Simon's work, see simonking wildlife.com.

COMPILED BY ANNA JURY AND CHARLOTTE DEAR

### ENJOY A SLOW SUNDAY

Why not set aside one day a week to savour the simple pleasures in life?





evive the rich tradition of Christmas and midwinter storytelling enjoyed by previous generations in less digitally dominated times. Tales take on new depth and meaning when read aloud and there's something therapeutic about listening to a storyteller at their best. But you don't need a professional to enjoy this ancient art form. Gather the family around the fire and take it in turns to read out short passages from favourite books, or re-tell stories you've heard or read before – even very young children can get involved by acting out their favourite book. If your town or village doesn't already have one, why not start a local storytelling festival where readings can be organised in pubs, cafés, churches and bookshops? The Society for Storytelling (sfs.org.uk) has details about this, as well as information on how to go about setting up your own event.



### DECORATE WITH NATURE

Twist holly and ivy into a loose wreath to hang on your door and fill jugs and vases with the sculptural forms of dried seed heads, such as alliums, honesty, grasses and rosehips from the garden.



### **WRAP UP**

Pour a glass of mulled wine, put on some carols and set aside an evening to wrap your presents. Use ribbons and tags recycled from last year's cards to brighten up simple brown parcel paper or encourage children to get involved by letting them create their own distinctive papers with various potato-printed designs.



### A SIMPLE MAKE... DÉCOUPAGE BAUBLES

Give a new lease of life to old decorations with glue and pretty scrap paper

- Choose the paper you're going to use - it could be wrapping paper, pages from a magazine, wallpaper or tissue paper. Cut what you've selected into postcard-sized pieces.
- Carefully roughen the surface of the bauble with a little sandpaper to create a 'key' for the glue and paper to stick to.
- Using a brush, apply a thin coat of PVA glue to the bauble and stick on your first piece of paper. If necessary, add a little water to the glue to make it easier to work with.
- 4 Continue to add the scraps of paper with thin layers of glue, overlapping the pieces where necessary.
- Finish by applying a final layer of glue or varnish all over the bauble to create a sheen. Replace the wire loop with a ribbon or a piece of twine.

Make created by Clementene Coates (clementenecoates.co.uk)



- ① Christmas Card Printing Workshop Hantsweb Shop, Minstead Study Centre, Hampshire Spend the day experimenting with a variety of methods and come away with ten unique festive cards to send to family and friends. 7 November; £25 (hants.gov.uk/shop).
- 2 Discover Pen & Wash Christmas Card Making Greystoke Cycle Café, Penrith, Cumbria Join local artist Margaret Jarvis for a one-day session working with watercolour and pen to create beautiful cards. 2 December; £68 including lunch (017684 83984; greystokecyclecafe.co.uk).
- 7 Printmaking for Cards and Small Gifts West Dean College, near Chichester, West Sussex Using polystyrene blocks, inks and a range of papers, learn creative printmaking techniques to make cards, gift tags and prints. II December; £117 (01243 811301; westdean.org.uk).



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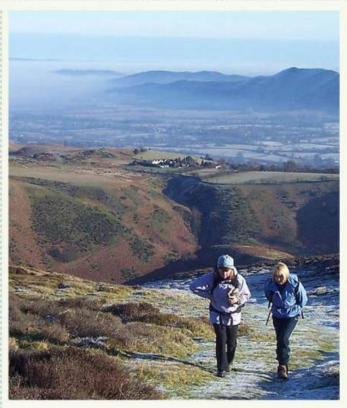
### MEET A COUNTRY



We're all familiar with the quintessentially English scene of Morris dancing at May Day fêtes and market squares, but what about its yuletide twin, the Mummers' Play? Performed in most villages in England at one point, this 18th-century tradition is best described as a kind of early pantomime with characters including St George and the dragon and, sometimes, Father Christmas, the Turkish Knight and Prince of Morocco. Its purpose was ostensibly to ask for a blessing on spring crops and livestock after a cold winter and to celebrate its passing but often it was used as an excuse for a festive knees-up. Retired government scientist Roy Hartwell (above) joined his local Morris group as he was interested in the music, but has since embraced the mumming revival and performs on Boxing Day and New Year's Day: "It's a crazily eccentric tradition to celebrate death and rebirth legends that abound in all religions, Pagan, Celtic and Christian," he says.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME? Holm

From the Old English word *holm*, which signifies an island, for example Steep Holm and Flat Holm in the middle of the Bristol Channel.\*\*



### NEWS YOU CAN USE

Venture out for a walk on a frosty December day and you'll be rewarded by seeing the countryside at its most peaceful - and the bare wintry landscape is ideal for discovering the tracks of foraging animals and spotting flocks of migratory birds. The annual Festival of Winter Walks (19 December-3 January), arranged by Britain's walking charity the Ramblers, offers the ideal opportunity: "Our walks during the festival are free and open to all, so put on your hat and scarf and join us to enjoy the season the way we know best - on our feet," says chief executive Benedict Southworth. Join a local organised walk or pick your own from the online library of 2,500. For more information, visit ramblers.org.uk.

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For bookworms Shakespeare's Birthplace, Warwickshire: 26 November-19 December See Shakespeare's home come to life in this magnificent light show (shakespeare.org.uk).



For atmosphere Mousehole Cornwall: 12 December, 7.30pm Watch as 7,000 lights illuminate the harbour to the melodic tones of a local choir (www.mouseholelights.org.uk).

For nature lovers Westonbirt

Arboretum, Gloucestershire:

Follow a mile-long trail through

trees lit by festive lights (forestry.

gov.uk/westonbirt-christmas).

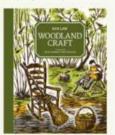
27 November-20 December

For art lovers Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire: 11 November-3 January 2016 Striking installations transform the historic gardens with light and colour (waddesdon.org.uk).

For families Stockeld Park, West Yorkshire: until 4 January 2016 Journey to a magical lake via a forest, meeting many characters along the way (thechristmasadventure.com).



### FROM YOUR ARMCHAIR



With more than 20 projects to make at home - from fencing to furniture - woodsman and eco-builder Ben Law shares his expertise on tree species and sustaining woodlands (GMC, £25).\*\*\*

48 **DECEMBER 2015** 





CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE The old harbour town has many characterful buildings, including St Petroc's Hotel; find picnic fare at Rick Stein's patisserie or enjoy fresh seafood at his restaurant

### FURTHER AFIELD



Hop on the small ferry and cross the harbour to neighbouring fishing village Rock, where you can admire some of the most sought-after houses in Cornwall. Take a stroll up Rock Road, and enjoy a cup of tea with a view of the harbour at The Mariners before carrying on up to Rock Bakery, with its excellent pasties. If feeling energetic, walk across the sand dunes to St Enodoc Church (above) to see the unusual stone spire and graves of former poet laureate John Betjeman and Fleur Lombard, the first female firefighter to die in service during peacetime.





### A NIGHT AND A DAY IN... PADSTOW

### Stay...

in St Petroc's Hotel, tucked into the slopes of this pretty harbour town. Its rich history is evident in the wood-panelled walls, exposed beams and views across old rooftops. The snug interior includes a cosy reading room and private dining room with open fires, making it perfect for a winter break. Many of the rooms are dog-friendly and all ten feature Molton Brown toiletries, luxurious towels and bathrobes. After a great night's sleep, breakfast on freshly smoked salmon and scrambled free-range eggs or a classic full English featuring locally made sausages (rickstein.com/stay).

### Eat...

in The Seafood Restaurant. A trip to Padstow wouldn't be complete without a visit to Rick Stein's shrine to all things fishy. Perfect for a festive treat, you can either sit at the bar for a more informal meal or indulge in the full dining experience. If you fancy a more hands-on meal, sign up for a day at Rick Stein's Cookery School, which offers classes in winter cooking, chocolate and yule log decoration in December, then savour the fruits of your labour at a table with a harbour view. For award-winning Cornish pasties made with local ingredients, visit the Chough Bakery in one of the old buildings on the quayside.

### Browse...

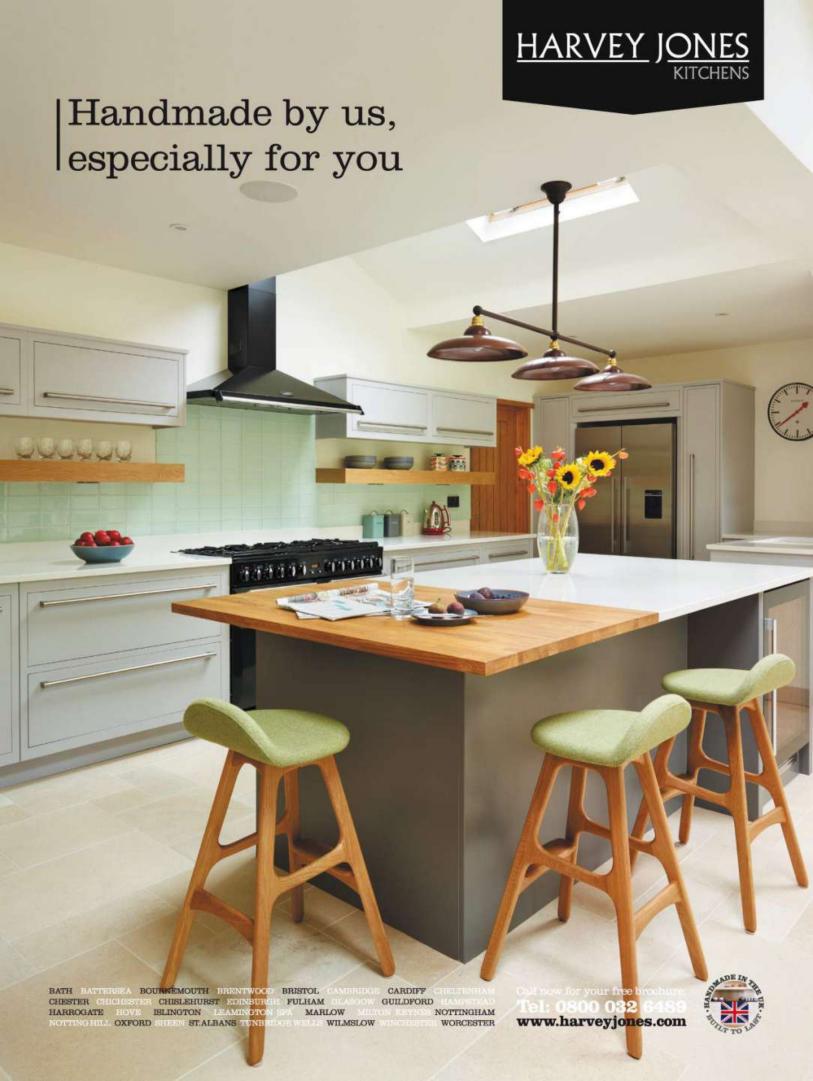
tempting treats on Lanadwell Street. Pop into Teri Walter for simple home accessories on a coastal theme or sample some fudge at The Buttermilk Shop, where flavours include Scrumpy (with Cornish cider) and Smugglers (rum and raisin shortbread with chocolate fudge). Pick up old-fashioned sweets and classic seaside rock at Cornish Delights, then head down to the harbour. Find gifts, clothes and jewellery handmade in Cornwall at Rocky Point, and stop by Whistlefish, one of several galleries selling prints and canvases inspired by the local scenery and wildlife.



Step back in time at Prideaux Place, built on the hill above Padstow in 1592, or stroll in the gardens beside its deer park

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**Don't miss** Padstow Christmas Festival, which brings together chefs, local food producers and craftspeople in a waterside setting (3-6 December; padstowchristmasfestival.co.uk).





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eader's House sits in the lee of St Laurence's church, in a quiet enclave within the walls of the thriving Shropshire market town of Ludlow, famous for its gastronomic festivals and castle ruins. Dating back to the early 17th century, this Grade I-listed townhouse on four levels features a three-storey, timber-framed porch with elaborate carvings and leaded-light windows that continue throughout. Inside, it has undergone meticulous restoration by the current owners, the result of which is a careful balance of original charm and modern-day comfort. From the spacious hallway, a characterful timber staircase leads down into the kitchen/breakfast room, which includes a range cooker, flagstone flooring and original wooden panelling. A study beyond offers access to the garden, while a dining room and sitting room, each with timber floors and impressive stone fireplaces, complete the ground floor.

The drawing room is on the first floor, which makes the most of the stunning views. The master bedroom above has panelled walls, exposed beams and an open fireplace, with an en-suite bathroom and walk-in wardrobe, while the remainder of the accommodation can provide three or four bedrooms, which share a luxurious bathroom, complete with a roll-top bath.

The garden is a generous size, given its location, and enjoys a good level of privacy. Mostly laid to lawn, it looks over the churchyard to the Shropshire hills beyond.

TTOGRAPHS BY ALAMY; MARK ASHBEE, BRENT DARBY; IAN DICKIN/RAMBLERSORGUK; FOTOLIBRA, GETTY IMAGES BEDNE CRATHMICKE, DAMIN COLEGIN DE CYCCORDAGEN II II IETD ATOMIC DA IO DIDE. 14A/EC CARDA, IOANNIA VEDD



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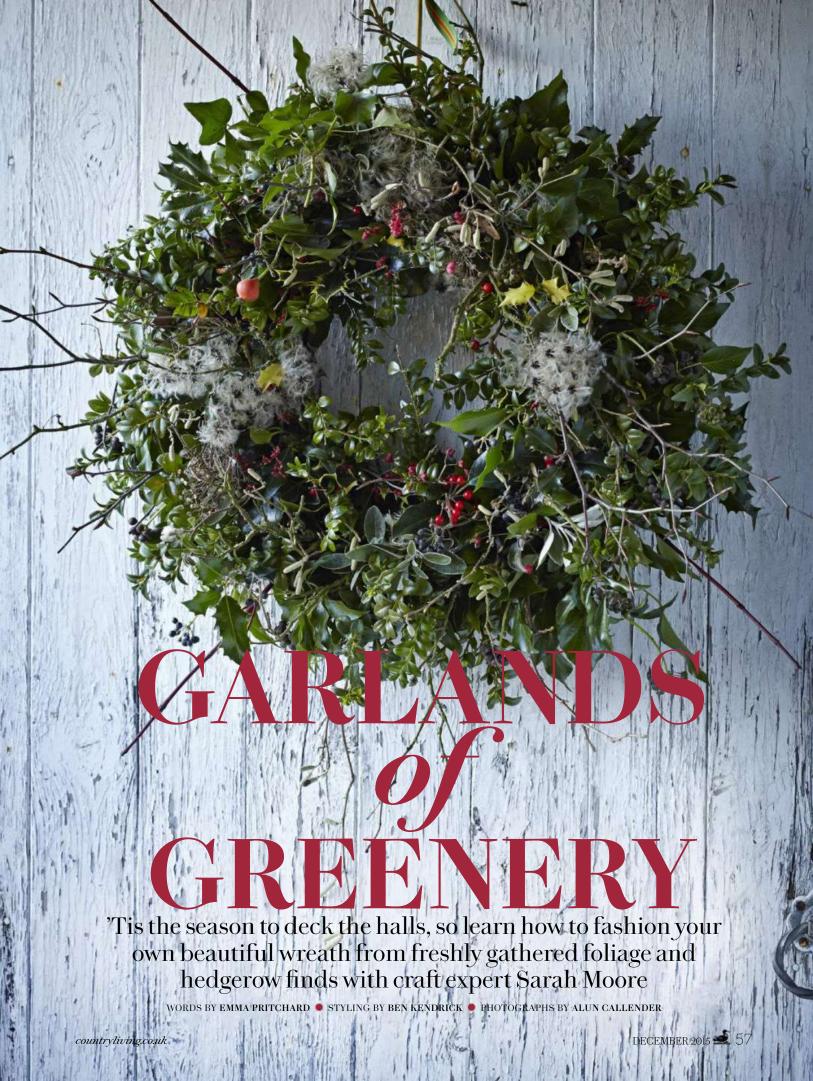
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t's one of those wonderful December days where powdery blue skies and brilliant sunlight tempt you outside, despite the winter chill. All around, hedgerows and trees are laden with creeping ivy, bright red holly berries and the translucent papery seed heads of honesty. Except, perhaps, in North Marden, West Sussex. For here, inside an 18th-century stone-built barn, a wide array of seasonal greenery – together with unusual wild elements from the hedgerows – has been gathered for my wreath-making-course companions and myself to enjoy.

Branches of fir and pine, plus bundles of mistletoe, willow and myriad herbs, such as rosemary, sage and thyme, overflow from galvanised buckets around the vaulted room. The feathery strands of old man's beard have been draped across a weathered wooden ladder, stored above our heads, while tree ivy lies, piled high, on the flagstone floor beneath our feet. Behind two long trestle tables stands our host, craft expert Sarah Moore, who is putting the finishing touches to her own seasonal display.

"Making a wreath is like taking a snapshot of your local flora and a sure marker that Christmas is on its way," she says, inviting us to join her and put her latest venture - a two-hour workshop - to the test. There are nine of us in the group and we've each been given identical oasis rings to cover, first with foliage, including tree ivy and box and, later, more decorative plants such as teasels and fresh figs. I'm amazed at how much is needed to disguise the green foam completely - and the length of time it takes. But there's something remarkably therapeutic about the repetitive nature of the job and, teamed with the friendly chatter of my comrades, plus the constant supply of soup- and hot-chocolate-filled enamel mugs being passed round, I couldn't be happier. The key to making a perfect wreath, according to Sarah, is to hang it up regularly outside to see where you need more of one plant and less of another.

Having created a balanced backdrop, we begin to add the main decorations – herbs for scent, dried seed heads for texture and hydrangeas for delicate colour. At the end of the session, it's amazing to see how different each of our efforts looks. From one combining pine cones and sloes to another with red berries and shrubby dogwood, despite having access to the same ingredients, they're all unique. I'm incredibly proud of what I've achieved in such a short space of time and it's been far more rewarding than buying a ready-made garland from a shop.

"Spritz it regularly with water and bring it inside ahead of harsh frosts," Sarah advises, opening the heavy door of the barn and straightening her own wreath, a firework of holly, ivy, lichen-covered twigs and rosehips. Season's greetings at their best!





THIS PAGE, TOP Visitors enjoy warming refreshments in the charming rural setting ABOVE Sarah selects some promising locally gathered wreath-making materials

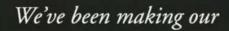




From assorted seasonal foliage, each unique wreath begins to take shape







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you can include, the more distinctive your wreath will be. Trimmings from Christmas trees, shop-bought herbs such as rosemary or a bunch of greenery from a florist can all be incorporated

if wild gatherings are not to hand.

### MAKE A WILD WREATH

Look out for foliage and interesting natural finds - grasses, teasels and seed heads - to work into a wreath from around September onwards. Holly, ivy, spiky evergreen yew or spruce, rosemary, pine box and privet and other softer evergreen foliage also work well as fillers for creating the bulk of the wreath. Fruits such as rosehips, berries, crab apples, spindle berries, callicarpa and sloe are perfect for adding colour, as well as deciduous garden shrubs like dogwoods. Try to find bare twigs with pretty lichens or buds like ash and beech and early hazel catkins that form before Christmas. The more variety, texture and colour

### YOU WILL NEED

Florist's foam wreath base
(35cm-diameter ring shown here)
60cm thick garden twine, to hang
Wild evergreen foliage
Dried seed heads such as old man's
beard and cow parsley
Hazel twigs with catkins
Fir cones
Florist's wire
Garden scissors or secateurs

- Defore you begin, soak the wreath base well in water so it is saturated. Double a length of twine and knot through the middle of the wreath to create a loop. Hang it up to drain (re-soak every few days to refresh).
- Use several handfuls of tree ivy to cover the base. Snip the stem at an angle into short sections, removing any leaves at the stalk end, and push into the foam base, starting on the outside and working into the middle. When the base is hidden, start to add interesting leaves and twigs. Prepare these in the same way as the ivy and poke firmly into the foam: arranging in groups of three or five around the wreath works well. Use woody stems first, building up to lighter, frothier details such as old man's beard and cow parsley seed heads. Bind together little bundles of softer materials with florist's wire and spear into the base.
- 3 Spike crab apples with a length of wire and twist it behind them before pushing firmly into the base.
- 4 Hang up the wreath at intervals to check it looks balanced. Fill in any gaps and finish with berries and hips.
- 6 Spritz with water to keep it fresh.
- visit sarahmoorehome.co.uk for details of her Christmas barn sale in West Sussex: 5-6 December, 10 am-4 pm. Admission is free but to book a place on a two-hour wreath-making workshop on either day for the special CL reader price of £40 (usually£45), enter the code CL15 at the online checkout.

WREATH-MAKING INSTRUCTIONS BY SARAH MOORE



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### "We've had llamas, donkeys, lizards and chickens – no one ever gets turned away"

1220 – an achievement largely credited to its first bishop, Edward White Benson. Four-, two- and no-legged animals have been allowed inside its Cornish granite walls for around 55 years following a brainwave by then-dean Henry Lloyd. Although not an original idea – pets have been celebrated by churches down the centuries – for a cathedral, the service was a fairly novel occurrence. The first one drew around 100 visitors from Truro and the surrounding area; the next almost 150; and so the event has continued to grow, with numbers reaching nearly 600 last year, with people travelling not only from Cornwall, but from throughout the south-west and even abroad.

### ANIMAL MAGIC

For Dean Roger Bush, who has been involved with the service for llyears, it is a particular highlight of the cathedral's calendar. "The clergy can come across as earnest or po-faced," he says. "But this occasion provides us with a platform to be a bit frivolous, but still serious about what our animals do give us: total and instinctive love. The British are always said to be sentimental about their pets, but I think we've just got our eyes open; the relationship between people and their animals is a very significant one." Dean Roger pauses to admire a three-year-old Scottish deerhound called Ludo that has just been led into the cathedral by its owners, Andrew Edmonds and Karen Tudor. At around 90cm to the shoulder, he represents one of the biggest canine visitors today,

along with Great Dane Sadie, brought from Yeovil by Mark Bearcroft. "We never know from one year to the next what we'll have, but that's part of the fun," Dean Roger adds. "We've had llamas, donkeys, lizards and chickens, and one lady usually arrives with her cockatoo. No one ever gets turned away."

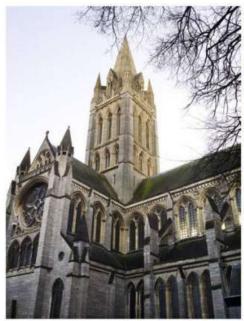
Caught in a stream of winter sunlight casting a colourful mosaic on the flagstone floor is Poppy, a six-year-old Labrador retriever who was taken in by Janet Harling from another family when they could no longer care for her: "I live in Newquay and have been coming for four years. The first year, Poppy found a toffee on the floor and spent the whole hour sucking it – that kept her quiet! Now she's older, she lies peacefully throughout. It's as if she can sense it's a sacred occasion."

### ORGANISED CHAOS

The cathedral has filled up; an experienced team of vergers is rushing around setting out more chairs and mopping up the minimal accidents from the more excitable or younger pets. The friendly chatter of returning visitors and the inquisitive babble

THIS PAGE, ABOVE LEFT Five-year-old Elanor with Sadie the Great Dane ABOVE RIGHT Retired racer Diesel and owner Pete OPPOSITE A menagerie of breeds attends the service in Truro Cathedral, including Pippin, owned by Georgie Hitchins (bottom left), and Scottish deerhound Ludo with owner Andrew (far right)

### TRADITION





















### A WINTER'S TAIL Three more animal-related Christmas services

CAROL SERVICE FOR ANIMALS AND PETS St Ambrose Church, Westbourne, Dorset; 20 December. Celebrate your pets, and light candles for those you want to remember, at this animal-friendly service. Carols such as While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks... and Little Donkey will be brought to life, with sheep and a donkey also planned to be in attendance (achurchnearyou.com).

HORSEMAN'S CAROL SERVICE Friezland Arena, Greenfield, Greater Manchester; 12 December. Horses are as welcome as cats and dogs in this outdoor service for animals of all shapes and sizes (odrc.co.uk).

CANINE PARTNERS CAROL SERVICE Guard's Chapel, London; 16 December: Pets may not be allowed, but that won't stop you from marvelling at the talents of this charity's assistance dogs. See and hear about how invaluable they are, while raising money for this worthy cause (caninepartners.org.uk).

of new ones mingles with a cacophony of barks, mews and rustling packets of pet treats. Then Dean Roger steps up to the lectern, tests the microphone and a stillness settles over the  $crowd.\ ``First, a \ notice \ to \ pets: make \ sure \ your \ owners \ are \ well$ behaved!" he says, starting as he means to go on - with humour - as this service isn't just for animal-lovers, but children, too. The congregation stands to sing as the organ strikes the first chord of While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks. It's a cue, too, for the animal members to participate and, although many do remain sitting quietly, a number join in - a howl comes from a Dalmatian during each chorus, while a black Labrador is cheerfully vocal throughout. The result, although unusual, is overwhelmingly joyous. "Leading up to Christmas, there are lots of formal services, which is right and proper. But this is one where we can relax, and if something goes slightly awry, it doesn't matter," Dean Roger says.

The first reading is given by a member of the junior church, Phoebe Gregory, aged 12, and then there are the standard prayers and thanksgiving. Finally comes a Nativity procession, in which children ranging from a few months old ("We always like to have a real baby Jesus," Dean Roger adds) up to teenagers, and their parents, walk through the nave and quire, dressed as shepherds and kings, to the Sanctuary, the place of the high altar.

### SOLACE IN REFLECTION

The worshippers are then invited to come forward to be blessed; and so begins a procession, reminiscent of Noah's Ark, as children and owners lead their dogs, and bring pet carriers containing cats, hamsters and guinea pigs up to the front of the church. "It's a chance for everyone to participate in the service," Dean Roger says.

However, a few people remain seated, today, without a pet. "We all have to say goodbye to our animals at some point, and this service can provide an opportunity to thank God for the lovely time we've had with them," Dean Roger explains. "I remember a lady who used to attend every year with her dog; then one year she was alone. Being among other pet owners gave her solace." As the service comes to a close, he casts his eye over the throng and smiles. Another successful year. He'll go home to his own dog, a 13-year-old Border collie called Maggie, and take her for a country walk. Unusually for a newer style of event, he observes, the Children and Pets Carol Service has never attracted a critical word. And it's easy to see why: "Animals bring people together from all walks of life, and that, surely, is what Christmas is all about."

**10** The Children and Pets Carol Service will take place at Truro Cathedral on 27 December at 2pm. To find out more, visit trurocathedral.org.uk.



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Meet four talented women who create beautiful handcrafted Christmas decorations guaranteed to bring a charming, original touch to your celebrations

WORDS BY CHARLOTTE DEAR PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT





THE LITTLE GARDEN WORKSHOP that is home to Fitzjohn & Stone is a hive of activity. With work well underway for Christmas, Helen is deep in concentration as she paints a Scottie dog on a gift tag while business partner Mary winds down her letterpress with a creak to emboss a Gothic 'Merry Christmas' onto a concertina card. Tucked into a corner of Mary's frost-covered Lincolnshire plot, the cosy studio is a cornucopia of foraged items and handmade creations at varying stages of completion. "You can find design inspiration in almost anything," says Mary (left), who trained in silversmithing, as she admires the treasures covering the walls, hanging from the ceiling and towering over her cherished Victorian cabinets.

The pair met when Helen joined Mary's previous design business, Birchcraft, where they worked together for six years before deciding, two years ago, to join forces in a new venture, Fitzjohn & Stone – a design partnership specialising in wood and paper gifts and cards. As they flick through old Czech illustrations and reminisce over childhood *Things to Make and Do* books of the 1960s and 70s, it's clear that Mary's quirky spontaneity is the perfect match for Helen's practical attitude and commercial awareness. Having previously worked in graphic design for six years, today Helen draws on this experience in her artwork, relishing the free range she now has as she covers cut-out wooden shapes with winter trees or turtle doves.

Although the pair often work separately from their homes, when it comes to Christmas, Fitzjohn & Stone is very much a team effort. "The good thing is, often you can't tell who's done what," says Helen, as she holds up a decorative paper garland. Always a busy time of











year, this festive season is even more hectic as they prepare for their first *Country Living* Christmas Fair in London. For the event, they'll be squeezing a tempting selection of festive gifts and stationery onto their stand, while delighting in the chance to chat to customers – something they miss when selling online. It's a workload that requires constant juggling and, for Helen and her family, alternative eating arrangements at times: "My children wouldn't know a dining-room table, as all they see is sticky tape and ink!" But, despite the chaos, no detail is overlooked, and as they carefully wrap the first of many flatpack wooden Christmas trees to be sent off, Helen and Mary remain unruffled, optimistic and cheerful, taking it all in their stride.

\*\*D See Fitzjohn & Stone's range at fitzjohnandstone.co.uk and receive a 30% online discount\* on gift-wrap sets by quoting CLXMAS. Selected items available at shop.countryliving.co.uk.

# FESTIVE CRAFTS















# FABRIC Nancy Nicholson

FOR TEXTILE DESIGNER NANCY NICHOLSON, Christmas begins in September when one meticulously organised corner of her Kent kitchen is transformed into a haberdashery full of paper, thread and fabric. During this time, Nancy's loyal Border terrier Biddy, often seen sporting a string of thread herself, has to remind her owner to tear herself away from perfecting her Christmas range of greetings cards and stationery. A quick stroll in the Wealden countryside that surrounds her weatherboarded cottage on the edge of Romney Marsh provides the ideal way to relax.

Nancy launched her textile company three years ago, following the death of her mother and developing cancer herself. "The business gave me the momentum to forge ahead," she says. She









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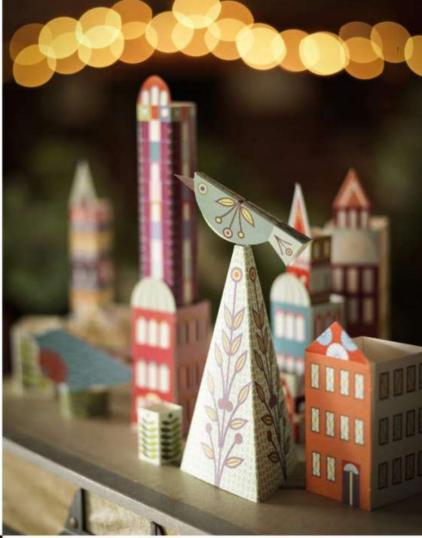
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Featured paint Viola's Bloom

#### FESTIVE CRAFTS







began with cut-out cards and decorations but, soon finding that she was spending the majority of her time packaging and posting items to customers, decided to try her hand at downloadable designs: "I suddenly realised that I could create a template and other people could make it; now my designs can be made over and over again." Nancy currently has 17 kits that can be downloaded, which means she not only spends less time packing, but also, more importantly, that the act of crafting is passed on.

These skills are in Nancy's blood: her mother Joan was a celebrated embroiderer and designer in the 1960s and 70s and her father Roger was a textile designer. Despite efforts to stray from this line of work, choosing instead to study graphic design at Maidstone College of Art, Nancy quickly found that the pull of crafting was too strong to ignore and gave into it after completing a Masters degree in fine art textiles at the Royal College of Art. Today, her mother's influence is undeniable in Nancy's prints, which feature characterful birds and vibrant colours, inspired by the sketchbooks she inherited from her.

Amid the "tsunami of bubble wrap" that invades her kitchen from early autumn right up to Christmas Eve, Nancy's festive designs include pretty card angels, embroidered felt baubles and decorative stationery for lucky customers to make themselves or order online. Now selling widely in the UK as well as in Australia, the USA and Japan, Nancy is "hoping to conquer France" next, while still finding the time to teach her craft to children and adults at local talks and workshops.

\*\*D See Nancy's designs at nancynicholson.co.uk. CL readers can save 10% on a Birdie Stitch Kit and order one for the special price of £14.85 at nancynicholson.co.uk/cloffer.html.



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CLAY Roxanne McIlvenny Lavender Blonde

AS ROXANNE McILVENNY SITS AT THE TABLE in her dining-room with her three-year-old daughter Sadie, both hard at work creating something beautiful with the roll of clay that lies in front of them, it is clear that this business is built around family life. Having always enjoyed crafting, each year Roxanne would fashion handmade Christmas cards, adorned with her daughters' thumb prints and other significant designs, to send to friends and family. But it wasn't until she chose clay as her medium in 2013 that Roxanne saw a gap in the market and

Lavender Blonde was launched the following February with Roxanne's garlands and hanging hearts, each perfected with her trusty rolling pin that remains her most important tool today. With a Facebook page now offering distinctive tags, wall hangings and keepsakes – all entirely personal and unique – the business has flourished.

discovered her new, potentially profitable, passion.

After running her own pet-accessories company from an e-commerce site, Roxanne chose to be a full-time mother to her first daughter, Scarlett, now seven. Since then, Lavender Blonde has allowed her the flexibility to work around her young family and, despite having been approached by several shops, she is careful not to let her enterprise become too big and encroach on this time. When the girls are in bed, Roxanne can often be found at her computer chatting to customers via Facebook, "My favourite thing is when a customer messages, saying, I need something for my mother's birthday but I don't know







what', and we chat, brainstorm and then come up with an idea together." Roxanne also finds inspiration in her surroundings – from berries and holly on a winter's walk to lace and pattern during a weekend away – and has a constantly changing stock.

From each piece's inception right up to its intricate packaging and finishing touches, every Lavender Blonde product is completely handmade. Although it is sometimes a challenge to forge ahead with her long list of Christmas orders without the girls asking to 'help out', for Roxanne this is an occupational hazard: "It started with them, from the very first rolling out, so it's only right that they remain a monumental part."

\*\*D See Roxanne's range at lavenderblonde.co.uk. CL readers can enjoy a 10% discount on orders over £10 placed before 31 December 2015 by quoting the code CLXMAS.

# THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE DETAIL

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Whether it's battling against drifts of snow or overcoming a shortage of provisions, nothing can repress the indomitable British urge to celebrate the festive season

# 1939 Poultry shop in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Before refrigerators came into common usage in the 1950s, poulterers, as they were known, had to overcome the challenge of storing and preserving the vast number of seasonal fowl required by customers to take centre stage on their Christmas dinner tables. Ingeniously, many did so by suspending stock outside their shop, as seen here, both taking advantage of the colder temperatures and displaying their wares to potential punters.





1939 Evacuated children celebrate in Keswick, Cumbria After World War II broke out on 1 September 1939, the hope was that it would 'all be over by Christmas'. Sadly, this was not the case, and 800,000 evacuated children were unable to return home for the festive season. Luckily, local councils and the Women's Voluntary Service arranged 'Christmas tea parties' in rural areas to keep everyone smiling.



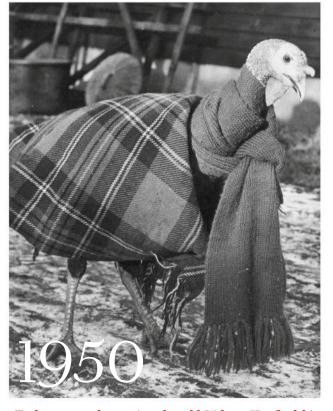
1943 Miners singing carols, Ystradgynlais, Powys Wartime Minister of Labour and National Service Ernest Bevin decided to combat the shortage of miners - most having left to join the

forces – by sending 20 per cent of new conscriptees, known as 'Bevin Boys', to work at the coalface. Here, a group, with their pit pony, enjoy a sing-along by the light of their safety lamps.



Ayoungster enjoys the second heaviest snowfall of the century, Cardiff

With drifts of up to six metres, power lines brought down and villages cut off, many people will remember a time that became known as Britain's 'Big Freeze'.



**Turkey wrapped up against the cold, Welwyn, Hertfordshire** Given the scarcity and high value of turkeys following the war, every precaution was taken to keep them healthy, as demonstrated here on Hambledon Farm.

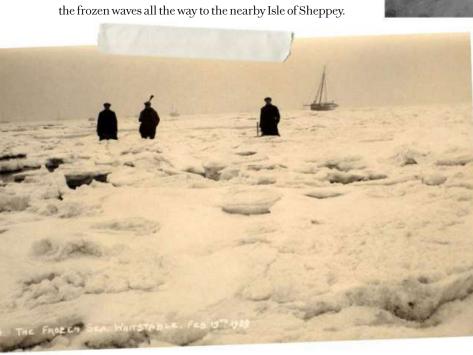
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1950 Festive coal giving, Windsor, Berkshire During his 16-year reign, King George VI gifted the poor with a delivery of coal each Christmas.

# $1929_{\,\text{Extreme weather causes the sea to freeze,}}$ Whitstable, Kent

Due to incoming freshwater streams, this part of the British coastline is often the first to ice over. This also happened in 1940, 1947, 1963 and reportedly earlier in 1891, when it was so solid that the harbour foreman was able to clamber over the frozen waves all the way to the nearby Isle of Sheppey.



# 1947 Passengers in Kent help push a bus back onto the road during one of the worst winters on record.

1918 Female factory workers make Christmas puddings for the troops, London Around 16 million

Around 1.6 million women joined the workforce between 1914 and 1918. During this time, 80 per cent of weapons and shells used by the British army were created by 'munitionettes', who risked their lives working with poisonous substances

without sufficient protective clothing. Here, workers can be seen making puddings to be placed in tins and sent to troops who could then boil them over a small fire. It would have been a rare festive treat, although the shortage of dried fruit, eggs and flour - ground  $turnip\,was\,often\,used$ instead - suggests that they bore little  $resemblance \ to \ those$ eaten today.

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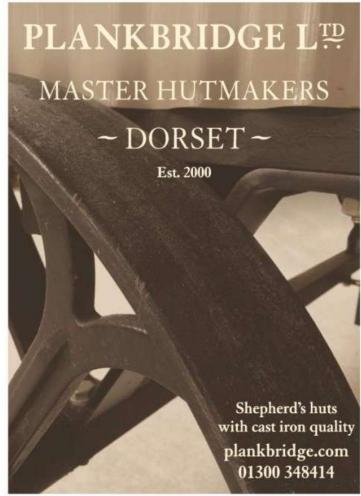




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# 1941 An unusual Father Christmas, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

With the majority of the men fighting overseas, one of the more curious roles that had to be filled by women involved a generous white beard and red coat, as was the case here during a festive party thrown at a home for evacuees.



1962 Walkinghome after a blizzard, Plymouth, Devon
Determined to get home for New Year's Eve,
motorists abandon their snowed-in vehicles.



1947 A lamb is rescued from a bank of snow, Peak Forest, Derbyshire

Throughout this memorable winter, conditions were so extreme that the armed forces were brought in to

airdrop supplies to those in rural areas who had been cut off by the snow. Farmers were particularly badly hit, especially those with early lambs such as the one seen here.



 $1940\,$  Celebrating in an air-raid shelter, Ilford, Essex

For many, the festive period of 1940 felt like the first true wartime Christmas. As a result of rationing, finding any meat – let alone a turkey – was challenging (although tea and sugar rations were increased in the week running up to the 25th) and heavy bombing meant an invasion was never far from people's minds. In a true example of Blitz spirit, however, festivities continued as normal, with many people spending the day in their air-raid shelter. Small Christmas trees were in demand, as they were the only ones that would fit inside.



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n the converted pantry of a Georgian farmhouse in the tiny North Yorkshire hamlet of Egton Grange, the warm and comforting aroma of ginger and spice wafts across the courtyard to the old stable blocks and milking parlour. Follow your nose and, through the window, Liz Druce, founder of The Gingerbread House, can be spied taking down jars of flour, ground ginger ("I add quite a lot. I think gingerbread should taste of ginger"), mixed spice and caster sugar. This will all be blended together with golden syrup, black treacle and eggs from the 30 hens that roam her four-acre plot to make a fragrant dough.

This is the beginning of just one of the 5,000 gingerbread house kits and 2,000 gingerbread men that she sends out every festive season: "From September onwards, it's heads down in the bakery. From November, I work 14-hour days to produce about 100 small kits and 30 large kits daily. Each one is mixed, baked and cut by hand." Watching Liz deftly mixing ingredients, it's hard to believe that baking hasn't been her life-long profession. In fact, it didn't become her full-time business until eight years ago. Originally trained in fine art at Loughborough University, she developed a passion for gardening during a gap year, then embarked on a 20-year career in horticulture. But eventually, after years of long, cold northern winters working outside, Liz felt the need to make a change. "I think one of the reasons I loved baking so much was because it meant I was near the warmth of an oven!" she says. Stumbling upon a gingerbread recipe in an old cookbook she found in a junk shop inspired her to try her hand at the festive fare. "I decided to make it as Christmas





THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Liz with one of her 30 hens, whose eggs are used to make the dough; the gingerbread biscuits are created

with a variety of copper cutters; hung from ribbon, gingerbread men make original decorations OPPOSITE One of Liz's ornately decorated gingerbread houses presents. It took a few attempts to get it just right, but I loved working with it. My mother is a ceramicist, so I've made things from clay since childhood. Gingerbread is warm, sculptural and you can eat it – what more can you ask for?"

It was Christmas 2003 when her bushand Stephen, a fellow.

It was Christmas 2003 when her husband Stephen, a fellow gardener based at the stately home Castle Howard, took a set of her gingerbread houses into work as a treat for colleagues. "They asked me to produce some to sell in the shop," Liz recalls. "At the same time, another friend commissioned me to make a replica of the pub she was working at." She was then encouraged to approach farm shops and cafés with her gingerbread house kits. The business developed gradually alongside the gardening, but after four years she took the plunge and went full-time.

Back in the pantry Liz is unwrapping some dough she made earlier in the week. "I leave it for a couple of days to mature as it's too soft to work with straightaway," she explains. "I used to roll it by hand but it's important the pieces are all the same thickness and fit together well, so two years ago I bought a commercial pizza-dough roller, which is quicker and more precise." The biscuits are then baked in a professional catering oven at I80°C. Liz still creates every single section of each house and all the gingerbread men by hand, but for the past two years she's had an assistant, Sarah, who lives locally, to help package up the kits during the busy run-up to Christmas. Such is the popularity of gingerbread houses that these days you can pick up one in most supermarkets – but they won't be like Liz's. Hers even have stained-glass windows: "I cut out a section on a wall and pop in a boiled sweet, which melts when it's baked."

Hanging from the walls, the handles of the copper cutters are rubbed bright through use. Gingerbread men dangle next to reindeer and snowflakes, but there are also chicks, rabbits, hearts and even seagulls. Gingerbread is a year-round business for Liz



#### RURAL BUSINESS



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Festive shapes are cut from the soft gingerbread dough; boiled sweets, which melt when baked, are used to create a stained-glass effect; Sarah helps package kits





and seasonal kits are sold around Valentine's Day and Easter, while bespoke biscuits are made for wedding favours and parties.

Always on the lookout for ways to innovate, Liz has added several extra strands to the business over the years: "I branched out into children's parties where each child would decorate a house, but I soon realised the adults wanted to get involved just as much." Each summer she and Stephen also pack up 'Bella', their cherry-red 1971 VW campervan, and create a pop-up tearoom at festivals.

Liz is delighted the European custom of decorating gingerbread houses for Christmas is gaining popularity here, but points out that the baked treat has its own history in Britain, too. "Elizabeth I used to give shaped pieces to important guests, and it has long been sold as 'fairings' in markets," she explains. Her version is also very different to the *lebkuchen* found in Germany, where the tradition of houses made of gingerbread is thought to have started back in the 1800s.

Decorating one of Liz's gingerbread houses is becoming an annual festive event in many homes: "Lots of families now place an order year after year. They send me pictures of them on the end result – I love seeing how people have made them their own." Of course, Liz's own farmhouse is also adorned with edible delights at this time of year. "When we moved in, we had the worst winter for 20 years. We were completely snowed in but it was my busiest time and I needed to get the orders out. We had to strap boxes to our chests and backs before wading through a mile of snowdrifts to reach the post office," she says. "We couldn't even get a Christmas tree, so we cut down a large holly branch from our hedgerow and hung decorations on it, including home-baked gingerbread men, of course. Now this has become a tradition of our own."

\*\*Order a gingerbread house kit (large £17.50; small £6.95) at the gbhouse.co.uk and quote 'Country Living' to receive a free pack of gingerbread men. Offer ends 15 December 2015.







## RURAL PRODUCER

EARLY ON A CRISP WINTER MORNING, loud squawks rise up from the barn at Middle Whitecleave Farm in the steep-sided Mully Brook valley in north Devon. On cue, John Burns strides out from his farmhouse towards the noise. As he clomps across the yard, the calls subside, replaced by an expectant humming noise as his gaggle of organic breeding geese wait to be driven to pasture. "When I arrive at the barn door each morning, a loud cheer goes up," John says. "It's a great start to the day."

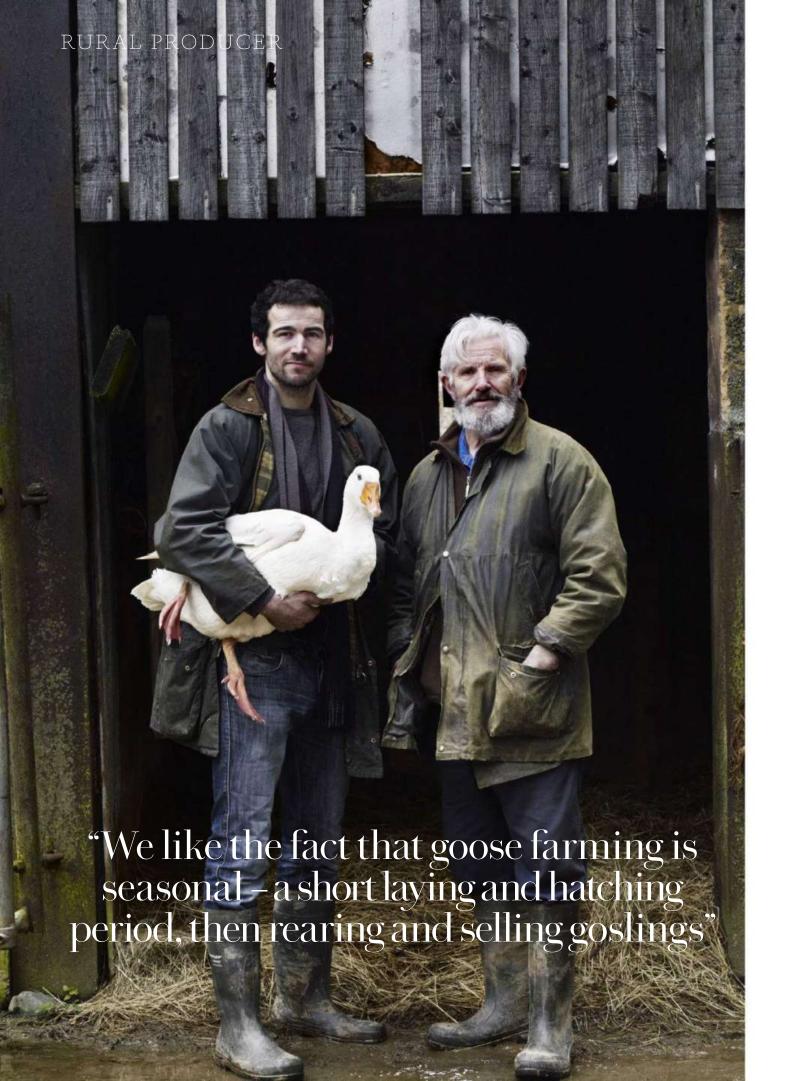
As the doors open, the predominantly Embden and West of England strains of geese, two-thirds female, stream out of the barn. They know exactly where they are going and race towards their fields, gently chivvied by John, who is often helped by his wife Jill with her new sheepdog/goosedog-in-training Nellie and their son Ed, 34. After the breeding birds have been liberated, the noisy seven-month-olds destined for the festive table are driven up to their allotted patch to nibble at the rich grass, preen, bathe, and chatter and argue among themselves until dusk falls. "When the light fades, the geese assemble, ready to be driven down to the safety of the barn and an evening feed," John adds. And yes, they cheer again when the Burns family arrives to walk them in.

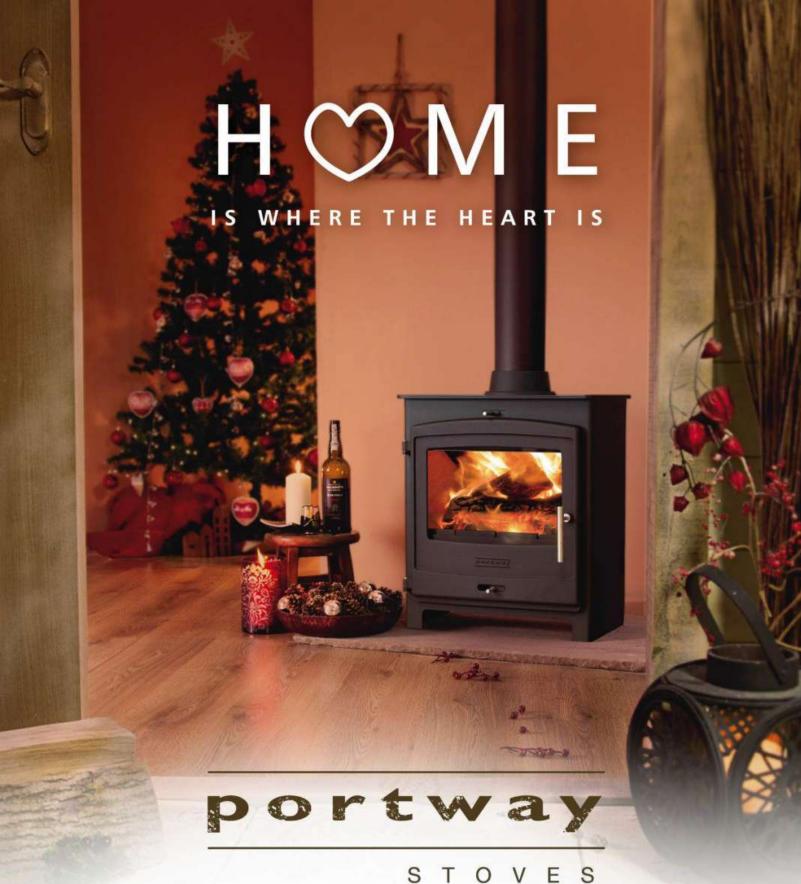
As the geese graze on the hillside above the farmhouse – a select group of pedigrees in pens below – they look a picture of contentment. "It's magic and a rare sight these days," John says. "Although free-range geese are kept outside, they are often in polytunnels." Waterproofed and kept warm by their layers of

feathers, down and body fat, those at Middle Whitecleave enjoy being out in all weathers, even snow, and will willingly walk significant distances to grassy pastures. John and Jill take pleasure in farming them the traditional way, using their carefully selected organic breeders as the sole source of eggs. Some of these are sold on to customers for hatching, others are sold as day-old goslings, but most are incubated at the farm to produce young that grow into plump birds for Christmas, with a few lucky ones reprieved to join the breeding stock.

The Burns family geese are the culmination of a lifetime's small-scale farming by John, now in his late seventies, and Jill, a few years younger. John's grandparents were farmers, and he trained in agriculture in the late 1960s, becoming a lecturer at Merrist Wood agricultural college in Surrey, where he also managed the attached farm for a decade. In the early 1980s, by then married to Jill and with Ed's two older siblings in tow, the couple started looking around for some land of their own.

"The best value at the time was in north Devon, so we bought a very rural, dilapidated mid-terrace house with a large garden and sheds," John remembers. They renovated it and rented extra grazing land for their small but growing collection of cattle and sheep, and in 1983 moved to another "doer-upper" six miles away with ten acres and room for a barn. "For 14 years, Jill did most of the daily animal husbandry, while I worked elsewhere to pay the bills," John says. By 1997, when the Burns bought







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## RURAL PRODUCER

Middle Whitecleave and its 50-acre, south-facing plot, they had built up a flock of 200 ewes, a herd of 50 cattle including calves, and 90 breeding geese, all grass lovers and therefore a good blend for the rich pasturelands of Devon.

John and Jill continued living their dream until three years ago when they couldn't physically cope with so much livestock and decided to concentrate on the geese and a small number of ewes. "We like the fact that goose farming is seasonal – a short laying and hatching period, followed by the rearing and selling of goslings for Christmas," John explains.

At the same time, their son Ed returned home from travelling, determined not to go back to the type of office job he had done before but to learn the ropes on the farm with a view to taking

on the business in the future. "What I've come to realise is that, despite stiff competition, there is room for the small but sustainable farm with a niche product, aimed at people who value food produced in a welfare-friendly way," he says.

Traditionally, geese start laying eggs on St Valentine's Day, trailing off in mid-June. "At the peak of the season, a good goose can lay no more than one egg on alternate days," John says. "They do this in the barn and also outside in the fields where the crows can get them, so we have to be vigilant about collecting." The large, chalky-coloured eggs are brought into the 'egg room', carefully washed and cleaned, then labelled and recorded before being moved into the hatchery and placed in a 24-tray incubator where they are kept at 37.1°C. After seven days,





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# A loyal following of customers buy oven-ready geese for Christmas

John can usually tell if the eggs will develop – goose eggs have higher rates of infertility than hen's - and removes the ones that show no signs of life. At 31 days, they hatch.

Jobs on the farm are divided according to physical strength and experience. John's domain is the egg room and hatchery, the pedigree goose pens and customer relations, while Jill multi-tasks wherever she is needed, with special responsibility for the flock of ewes and several chickens. Ed does the heavy work such as tractor driving, fencing, painting and repairs, and general goose chores such as egg collecting.

Over the years, Middle Whitecleave Farm has built up a loyal following of customers who buy oven-ready geese for Christmas, delivered as far afield as the Isle of Arran. The range of birds available begins with a small 2kg-3kg Czech, suitable for two to three people, to a 3.5kg-4.5kg West of England that feeds four to five, and Embdens of various sizes from 4.5kg-8kg for dinners catering for between five to 12. "Initial contact is usually via the website, then people phone

to discuss requirements, which can be anything from how to cook a goose, to a request for feet to be included with the giblets for making stock, to extra goose fat, all of which we can provide," John says.

The preparation of the Christmas geese begins on the first weekend of December, when they are despatched on the farm and hung in a chiller for two to three weeks to improve flavour and tenderness, then dressed just prior to being sent out. "We often work through the night to pack the oven-ready birds into insulated boxes, ready for courier pick-up first thing in the morning," Ed says. By Christmas Day itself, the family looks forward to feasting on their own tender, succulent roast goose, cooked by the redoubtable Jill. Now, with Ed's involvement, this traditional farm is set fair for the future.

🕖 Middle Whitecleave Organic Geese (01769 520506; organicgeese.com).



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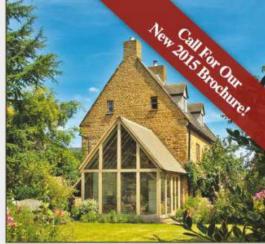
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Eyes to the skies this winter! You may just be fortunate enough to spot the mysterious and majestic snowy owl, with pure white camouflage and feathered feet, on one of its rare visits to Britain

t happened 30 years ago but the memory is as strong as ever. In 1985, I had gone to Shetland to look for otters among the holms and skerries of Britain's most northerly islands. My guide was the great naturalist Bobby Tulloch, and we had set off by boat from his home on Yell, heading for the windswept island of Fetlar.

Once ashore, we had not travelled far when a large bird suddenly caught my eye. Crouched on the ground with its wings half raised, it glared at me with mad yellow eyes. Its feathers were the colour of winter, of snow and hoar frost, barred and flecked with brown, and I knew straightaway what it was: a female snowy owl. Judging by the most recent sightings, you are generally more likely to spot a snowy owl in winter, even if the chance of it happening is rare.

#### LIFE IN THE TUNDRA

The global population of the species is around 300,000 - the most famous being Harry Potter's winged messenger. But long before Hedwig flew from the pages of J K Rowling's fantasy novels, these beautiful birds have been revered and celebrated by the First Nation peoples of the frozen north. There is an air of mystery about them, and among the Inuit people of Alaska their name is Ookpik, the Ghost Owl,

the phantom of the Arctic night whose task is to gather up the souls of the departed.

Measuring 60cm tall and weighing anything up to 1.8kg or over, they are one of the world's largest owls and can live more than ten years in the wild. Females are larger than the males, but these have a more powerful call, their gruff voice loud enough to be heard seven miles away in the Arctic air. The females are also more heavily marked than the males, which are much paler and become almost pure white with age; but both are ideally camouflaged for life in the extreme north, and their feathered



Waxwing (Bombycilla garrulus) These crested beauties from Scandinavia come to plunder our garden berries. Some years they arrive in large flocks, while in others there are

Snow goose (Chen caerulescens) Like the snowy owl, this is another North American bird that breeds above the timberline. Sometimes seen in Britain in the company of barnacle and Greenland white-fronted geese.

Gyrfalcon (Falco rusticolus) This is the world's largest falcon and an Arctic hunter that turns up from time to time in Britain - the most recent sighting was in Lincolnshire in 2014.

Harlequin duck (Histrionicus histrionicus) This handsome visitor has been seen in Britain only a score of times since records began, but one was spotted last winter on Aberdeen's Don estuary.

Arctic redpoll (Carduelis hornemanni) This modest sparrowsized finch is hard to tell from other more common redpolls, but twitchers always flock to see it, as in 2012 when one dropped in at Aldeburgh in Suffolk.

hardly any to be seen.





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feet are perfectly adapted to with stand the polar climate in which the average winter temperature is minus  $35^{\circ}{\rm C}.$ 

Equipped with keen eyes and the sharpest of talons, snowy owls are supreme hunters and are on the lookout for prey at all hours of the day and night. Their diet consists mainly of small mammals such as voles, and they also catch hares, fish and a variety of birds, including ducks, geese, gulls, ptarmigan and even herons.

#### **HUNTING INSTINCT**

By far their favourite prey is the lemming, a prolific Arctic rodent that sometimes undergoes huge population explosions. An adult snowy owl can easily eat five a day – and does so by swallowing them head first. Any indigestible material such as bones, teeth, fur and feathers is regurgitated 24 hours later as pellets. When hunting, they systematically observe, or quarter, their territory like a harrier, flying slowly on outstretched wings, casting a 152cm shadow on the ground beneath, their thistledown bodies rising and falling with every down-stroke. But their main strategy is to watch and wait, perched on the ground as they listen for the slightest sound with ears so fine-tuned, they can even hear the movements of lemmings under the snow.

When the sun reappears and the snow melts in spring, the tundra's gleaming ponds come alive with the dynamo whine of a billion mosquitoes. But summer is brief in these Arctic barren lands – a mere six weeks in which the owls must nest and raise their young before the long blue nights of polar twilight return. Snowy owls mate for life and it is now that their year begins with the courtship dance in which the male proves his success as a hunter by catching and presenting prey to his mate.

Once a nest site is chosen – usually a mere scrape on a *pingaluk* (an Inuit word for the hummocks flung up by the permafrost) – as many as II round white eggs are laid. Only the female incubates these while the male hunts for food, but both birds will defend the nest aggressively, dive-bombing all intruders, including Arctic foxes, skuas and wolves. The eggs hatch five weeks after being

Perched on the ground, they listen for the slightest sound with ears so fine-tuned, they can hear lemmings under the snow

laid and the young owlets grow fast, leaving the nest 25 days later, although it will be another three weeks before they can fly well, and so the parents continue to feed them until they can fend for themselves, sharing the skies with other raptors, including golden eagles, gyrfalcons, peregrines and great horned owls.

#### A BREED APART

After a good 'lemming year', snowy owls thrive on the abundance of prey and their numbers increase, forcing many birds to migrate in search of food, crossing America as far south as Mexico and Florida, and sometimes turning up in Britain. Between 1950 and 2007, the British Trust for Ornithology recorded 166 sightings. In 2009 a snowy owl was spotted in Cornwall, where it took up residence for a time near St Ives, and another one appeared in the Cairngorms two years ago. Our most famous visitors were the pair that arrived on the island of Fetlar in Shetland in 1967, and it was Bobby Tulloch who famously found them – Britain's first nesting snowy owls. They continued to breed until 1976 when the male disappeared. One or two females were spotted every summer until 1993, waiting in vain for a mate, and it was one of these I had been so fortunate to see on that memorable day three decades ago.



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Yet, whilst it's proud to enable you and your dog to spend more time together than your dog's average lifespan, Eukanuba believes that's not enough. It's about healthspan as well as lifespan meaning more healthy, active and happy times together, EUKANUBA with appropriate care, can help you and your dog enjoy your favourite games for as long as possible.

As a veterinary surgeon, I would expect a Labrador, like



Utah, Iowa or Clown, to show serious signs of ageing at around 8 or 9 years old. When I saw these dogs that were 15, 16, 17 years old - and they look and move like 9, 10, 12 year olds - you really realise that this study is actually bigger than just numbers on paper.



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\* 10 years of observations conducted at Pet Health & Nutrition Centre in Ohio, 2004 - 2014.

To find out more about 10 years of learning and meet the stars, like Utah, lowa or Clown, check out www.eukanuba.co.uk

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### COUNTRY TRADITIONS

Mistletoe has long had a role in winter festivals and folklore, playing a part in rites designed to protect crops and to keep witches at bay, while festive boughs were hung at gatherings and the berries plucked with each kiss until all were gone. Burning a ball of mistletoe and hawthorn on a straw fire was said to ensure soil fertility, women who wished to conceive traditionally wore a sprig, and it has been used regularly in natural remedies over the years.

In the 18th century, the popularity of the plant was boosted by the rise of druidism, helped by the enthusiastically eccentric antiquarian, the Reverend William Stukeley. He elevated and embellished old customs, popularising notions of golden sickles and white-robed virgins, and rendering mistletoe grown on oak as central to the whole druidic religion. Actually, mistletoe rarely grows on oak but, unimpeded by reality, 'oak mistletoe' was often found for sale as enterprising country folk discovered a market. And, gradually, the revitalised mythology became embedded, even commonplace. The druidic and Celtic fertility rites were sanitised to a Christmas kiss beneath a sprig, although many parishes considered mistletoe inappropriate for dressing churches until at least the 1960s.







### WHERE TO FIND IT

Relatively common on large trees such as lime, poplar, field maple, elm, sycamore and ash, mistletoe also likes to grow on hawthorn and has been recorded on laburnum and walnut, as well as almond trees. It particularly favours apples and in the mid-19th century was recorded on 34 per cent of trees in Herefordshire's orchards.

As traditional orchards were grubbed up or replaced by intensively managed and relatively short-lived stands of dwarf trees, this parasitic plant declined similarly. However, its willingness to colonise other members of the rose family such as amelanchier and cotoneaster has allowed it to spread into parks and gardens.

Keepers of traditional orchards view this uninvited guest ambivalently. A heavy infestation can weaken a tree, or even occasionally kill it, but supplying the Christmas market could provide a useful extra source of cash. A mistletoe fair and auction of the English-grown harvest still takes place at Tenbury Wells in Worcestershire, although the majority is now imported from France.

### SNIP A SPRIG

In the less commercially critical environs of a garden, the appearance of *Viscum album* is usually welcomed and the plant encouraged and cherished. Left wild, woolly and untrimmed, a vigorous mistletoe could overwhelm a small domestic fruit tree, so the trick is to treat it as you would any other plant. Cutting it back to a manageable size poetically encapsulates

ECEMBER 2015



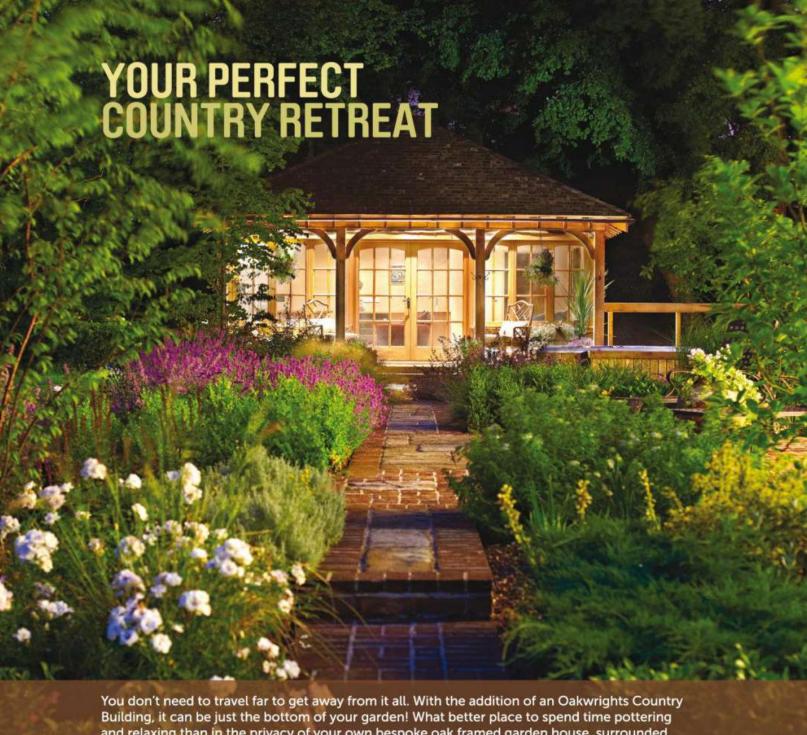
THIS PAGE, ABOVE
Now associated with
Christmas, mistletoe
has been used as a
decoration at midwinter
festivals since ancient
times. The tradition of
kissing beneath it harks
back to fertility rites
LEFT The pale
gleaming berries
contain sticky viscin,
which adheres the
seed to a branch

both the spirit of good horticulture and the symbolic gathering in of greenery. Not only does it spread the festive love, but the action of collecting keeps the tree healthy and the balance between the parasite and the host tipped in favour of the survival of both.

Harvesting techniques vary – some people strip a tree, others take just a few sprigs – but common sense would dictate a measured approach and the use of telescopic pruners to reach the highest clumps. Take an amount that will ensure the host continues to grow strongly but so the balls of mistletoe remain a feature.

As its glistening globes hang like baubles on a Christmas tree, mistletoe offers up an appealing piece of history and magic. Its cultivation can only add pleasure and interest to the garden and to our enjoyment of the festive season.

To further information, visit mistletoe. orguk and englishmistletoeshop.co.uk.

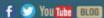


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GET OUT IN THE COUNTRY





### HOW TO GROW MISTLETOE

Mistletoe is usually spread by birds, such as the mistle thrush, which wipe the sticky berries from their beaks onto a branch or excrete them after eating. The seeds adhere to the branch and germinate, penetrating the bark to send a pseudo root system into the tree's cambium layer from which the minerals,

nutrients and water needed for photosynthesis are absorbed to establish a new plant.

When propagating, the best results are from berries collected from February to April – ripe and white, not an immature yellow or green. Those used for decoration at Christmas may no longer be viable, but sprigs for propagation

can be kept in water in a cool, light room until you are ready to sow the seeds.

According to mistletoe.org.uk, it is not essential to cut into the bark but the seeds do need light. Take a berry, remove some of the sticky viscin and use the rest to attach the seed to a reasonably young branch, where it can

photosynthesise and not dry out. It has no source of water until it has parasitised the tree.

Mistletoe is dioecious – you need both male and female plants for berries to form, so sow plenty of seeds as only around one in ten will establish. It can take up to five years for a plant to reach berrying size.













- When propagating, protect the developing berries from birds with netting until they are ready to be harvested in late winter or early spring
- ② Harvesting mistletoe offers an opportunity to cut it back
- to a reasonable size and reduce the burden on its host tree, ensuring it will not overwhelm and destroy it
- Making sure the berries are white and ripe, use them to sow plenty of seeds, as the
- success rate for germination is not particularly high
- The sticky mucilaginous tissue in the berries, called viscin, adheres the seeds to the branch of the host tree
- 6 Mistletoe prefers trees with
- fairly thin bark, particularly favouring apples and others in the *Rosaceae* family
- The seed and young seedling need to photosynthesise so take care not to exclude light when positioning them

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ewly fallen snow crunches and squeaks under our boots as we climb our favourite Boxing Day hill. I am keeping its exact location a mystery – all I can say is it's somewhere in the West Country. It's small, not more than a couple of hundred feet from base to summit. An Iron Age hill fort surrounds its brow like a royal circlet, and the button on the crown is a Bronze Age bowl barrow. People must have been climbing it, in sunshine, rain and snow, for thousands of years, following the age-old imperative to stand higher than the surrounding land, up where the everyday drops away and all seems sublime.

At the top it's cold and windy, with distant hills lying like frozen surf waves along the northern horizon. I slip off my backpack and pull out my melodeon. With numb fingers I fumble at the buttons, and slowly a tune emerges, jerky and hesitant as though surfacing from hibernation. It's the first time I've played it since this day last year – *The Holly and The Ivy*, old-style. My companions join hands and dance, not pale and solemn, but with red cheeks and a lot of laughter. This is what we do each Boxing Day, come rain, come shine.

There have always been rituals and jollifications on St Stephen's Day, 26 December, whether it was giving 'Christmas boxes' of money to one's servants or hunting the wren because, legends said, it was the little bird who betrayed the whereabouts of the fugitive St Stephen to the saint's persecutors. But long before Christianity came to these shores, people would have responded to the same impulse on the morning after the big

## Climbing a hill gets the blood racing and cheeks tingling

ABOVE
Taking a
December
walk is the
ideal time
to admire
the beauty
of wintry
landscapes,
such as the
Campsie Fells
in Stirlingshire

midwinter feast day. There were too many pies – and too much piety – back in the days when you couldn't crack a Christmas smile for fear of the devil. But Charles Dickens put paid to that sort of po-facedness nearly 200 years ago with his depiction in *A Christmas Carol* of an open-hearted, open-handed festive season. Since then, we've learned to love our Christmas feasting but we still need as much as we ever did (and maybe more, with our new 'mindfulness' and health-consciousness) that time-honoured antidote – to get outside and away from the house, to fill our lungs with clean, cold air, and go climb a hill to get the blood racing and an invigorating hot tingle in the cheeks.

My father would have laughed at the very notion of 'mindfulness', but he and my mother got my sisters and me outside every Boxing Day for a reviving walk, more often than not up Bredon Hill in Worcestershire, half an hour's drive from home. We were sometimes sulky, usually reluctant at first. But now Boxing Day on Bredon Hill is one of my favourite childhood memories – the milky panes of ice in the frozen ruts of the cart track



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that led up from Westmancote, the plumes of breath that turned me magically into a steam engine, and the squashing of the sun into a sullen red ellipse as it sank into a black net of leafless trees. It didn't matter that the countryside lay dark and dead - that was part of the spell.

Hardly a year has gone by since when I haven't gone out for a walk in snow or sunshine, far or near, steep or flat, with the kids or without them. And now, looking back, I see that those winter expeditions on Bredon Hill remained the template for all my subsequent Boxing Day walks - until, some 30 years ago, I found my own little steep local version with the button on top.

Up on that West Country hill, the snow has begun to fall again, and the prints of our dancing feet have long since disappeared. We are in the pub near the foot of the slope - a wonderful old inn, the kind you dream of and rarely stumble across - singing and drinking and watching the local mummers acting out, clumsily and hilariously, the kind of ancient earthy pantomime that has been played in rooms like this since time out of mind. The beer and the singing wouldn't taste the same without the walk as a relish. And the walk would lose half its savour if we didn't cap it with firelight and foolery. That's the whole magic of walking on Boxing Day. Long may it last.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP **Enjoy** exhilarating views on the clifftops at Birling Gap in East Sussex; glimpse wildlife among the woodlands at Bredon Hill, Worcestershire

### FIVE OF THE BEST **BOXING DAY WALKS**

#### Belle Tout, East Sussex

Getting there: East Dean is signed off A259 Seaford-Eastbourne Road; OS Explorer 123. The walk (four miles): from The Tiger Inn (01323 423209), follow Went Way, then the path over Went Down to Birling Gap and up the coast path to Belle Tout lighthouse. Return via Cornish Farm. Highlights: an exhilarating walk over to the coast at Birling Gap. Beside the lighthouse, you look out across land, sea and a line of brilliant white chalk cliffs.

### Bredon Hill, Worcestershire

Getting there: M5, junction 9; A46 (Evesham); just after junction with B4078, left to Elmley Castle; OS Explorer 190.

The walk (four miles): at crossroads beside The Oueen Elizabeth Inn (01386710251), turn right along Hill Lane. Pass Hill House Farm; follow the bridleway up to Parsons' Folly tower. Highlights: far-reaching views from the crest, where the Banbury Stone resembles a kneeling elephant.

### Pembrokeshire Coast Path, Tenby, Wales Getting there: M40, A40; A477, A478; OS Explorer OL36.

The walk (seven miles): follow the Pembrokeshire Coast Path north to Saundersfoot.

Highlights: start with a stroll around the old walled town of Tenby and blow away the Christmas cobwebs as you follow the cliffs to Saundersfoot. Views round Carmarthen Bay are stunning. Early birds will aim to get back to Tenby for 11.30am to witness the genial madness of the fancy-dress Boxing Day Swim.

### Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire

Getting there: B1255 from Bridlington (A165); OS Explorer 301.

The walk (seven miles): a circuit of Flamborough Head via North and South Landing. Highlights: these vast chalk cliffs tower above the

sea. Always windy (take care on the edges); usually noisy with gulls and the crashing of waves. Dip into the fishing coves of North and South Landing before heading back into Flamborough to catch the traditional Flamborough Sword Dance in Dog and Duck Square.

### Dumgoyne, Campsie Fells

Getting there: A81, Glasgow to Strathblane; on towards Killearn. After three miles, park in layby opposite Glengoyne Distillery; OS Explorer 348. The walk (two miles - but steep!): cross road and continue along a gravel track beside cottages for half a mile. Just before Blairgar Cottage, go right through gate; then left through trees and across grass towards Dumgoyne Hill. Cross two stiles; climb to summit.

Highlights: enjoy a good stiff climb to work off festive excess, with mind-blowing views from the top.

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# Style solutions

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### CL PROMOTION





ith the new year approaching, many of us begin looking for ways to freshen up our homes in the coming months. A new wall or floor of tiles can instantly update a room, especially if you choose a bold colour or distinctive design. Traditionally used in kitchens and bathrooms, tiles are now being utilised in hallways and living areas to create a stylishly different look. If you're unsure where to start and would like advice on what will complement your home, visiting Topps Tiles will give you the answers you need. The leading tile specialist has more than 340 stores nationwide, which can offer you a wealth of practical help and inspiration. Whether you prefer a natural look or a more elaborate design, you will find a wide selection to choose from. New ranges include Regional Reflections (shown above and right), which are stone-effect ceramic tiles in six attractive neutral shades that will suit any style of interior, from classic country to a modern rustic look. Each design has been inspired by traditional quarried stone found throughout the UK, from Langport and Ashington in the south to Lowick and Annan in the north. If you are still finding it hard to decide, the online Visualiser has multiple room sets and more than 1,300 tiles, so you can mirror your own home to see what works best for you. Simply choose the tiles and grout colour, then tailor the design for a unique interior. Topps Tiles has all you need to ring the changes this season.

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Francisco Segarra THIS PAGE,
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
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### INTERIORS





fragrant flourish of seasonal greenery and hedgerow finds, the beautiful wreath that adorns the front door of the Hill household's pretty gabled cottage presents a welcoming sight for visitors over the festive period. Charmingly informal yet deeply stylish, it hints at the inviting home within and sets the scene for an idyllic country Christmas.

Situated in a small hamlet where the Hampshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire borders meet, not far from Newbury, the late Victorian farmworker's cottage has a traditional red-brick exterior that belies its unexpectedly light feel. The interior has been thoughtfully transformed, without losing any of its original character, by owners Laura and Jem into a comfortable yet elegant space ideal for modern family life with their children Bruno, seven, and Polly, four.

Winter sunshine streams in through skylights, plentiful windows and tall French doors, illuminating the generous open-plan kitchen/dining area at the rear of the house, which is very much the heart of the home. It looked rather different when they moved in three years ago, however. "The existing kitchen was L-shaped and there wasn't even room for a table," Laura recalls. They worked with a sympathetic local craft builder to create an extension in keeping with the age of the property, and the result is a bright, airy room where meals are enjoyed at a large dining table positioned in the corner where two runs of casement windows meet, to make the most of views across the garden to the fields beyond.

Laura often adds a simple vase of seasonal flowers to the table but at this time of year, early forced snowdrops and delicate hellebores, potted up in old aluminium jelly moulds and large vintage glass jars, make a striking centrepiece. Years of experience as a stylist – for *Country Living* magazine, among other





### INTERIORS











## Handmade elements and seasonal displays add original festive touches

publications – have given her an enviable ability to track down interesting pieces and use them to add striking original finishing touches. With its horizontal wooden planking on various walls and pale palette of warm off-whites and calm greys by Little Greene, the room has an appealing rustic French/Scandinavian feel, which is even more pronounced at Christmas when cheery accents of bright pink and red – in the form of giant paper pompom decorations, napkins and candles – introduce a festive zing.

Ceramic industrial-style wall-lights cast a cosy, inviting glow, as do the quirky, characterful table lamps dotted about the place, custom-made to order by Laura for her fledgling business Spoon & Co. Distinctive vintage glass jars or bottles form the bases and, teamed with shades in bold stripes or eye-catching florals and a length of colourful fabric flex, they provide a constantly changing carousel of pattern and colour as they take up temporary positions around the cottage, before heading off to new homes.

Glassware and cutlery gleam in the mellow light, and baubles glint on the tree, which is decked in hues that echo the bold seasonal accents elsewhere. "I like lots of colour – reds and pinks with touches of mustard yellow," Laura explains. The tree usually appears in mid-December and comes from a local nursery: "They're grown on site so you can choose the one you want and even cut it down yourself! We don't put it up too early, though, as it feels more

special when it's part of the real run-up to Christmas." Dressing the tree is very much a group activity – she is assisted by an enthusiastic Bruno and Polly, who are given a decoration each year to add to their collections. The baubles are an eclectic, evocative mix, ranging from old favourites – glittering mercury-glass ones picked up by Laura on travels in Sweden, along with painted folk-art Dala horses and wooden hearts – to gleaming metal biscuit cutters and navy felt stars made by Bruno, who also bakes (under Laura's watchful eye) spiced traditional Scandinavian-style Christmas biscuits in the shape of snowflakes, reindeers and stars. Some of these are hung on the tree, but plenty are kept back to enjoy as a teatime treat.

As the December days pass, the pile of presents in pretty patterned papers under the tree grows larger and the anticipation mounts until, after what seems like for ever to Bruno and Polly, it is Christmas Eve at last and time to hang up their stockings. These are placed beside the woodburning stove in the sitting room, with a note from

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Bruno sifts icing sugar onto his Christmas biscuits; bright pink and red accents warm the pale scheme in the sitting room; gleaming glassware and baubles reflect the glow of flickering tea lights THIS PAGE A distinctive lamp by Laura makes a striking decorative statement while illuminating a seasonal still-life

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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Packages in eye-catching patterned papers are arranged under the tree; the quirky fairy at the top is by The

Magpie & The Wardrobe; Bruno and Polly open gifts watched by Rusty the dog **OPPOSITE** The jolly playroom holds an array of toys and games

Bruno to Father Christmas to thank him for coming, a glass of warming sherry or whisky – and carrots for the reindeer, of course. The next morning, the children burst excitedly into their parents' room ("hopefully not too early") and they all head downstairs to see whether Father Christmas has paid a visit. Sure enough, there are squeals of delight at the sight of the bulging stockings.

Breakfast features treats such as croissants or pancakes and Bruno and Polly then have fun with their gifts in the playroom, a cosy space that opens onto the kitchen, while Jem and Laura crack on with the food preparations. A light lunch of smoked salmon and Prosecco sets them up for a big walk "come rain or shine", followed by the opening of the presents under the tree. Several hours later, when the last one has been opened, the children are allowed to stay up a little later than usual so they can enjoy Christmas dinner together. Having pulled their crackers and feasted on turkey with all the trimmings – and perhaps some Christmas pudding if they can find room for it – Bruno and Polly head off to bed, exhausted but elated. And it is not all that long afterwards that Laura and Jem wend their way up the stairs, too, feeling quietly contented and a little wistful that this magical day is over for another year.

for more details about Spoon & Co lamps or to place a commission, contact Laura at info@spoonandco.uk.









The first fall of snow has a transformative effect on the gardens at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, bringing out the elegant geometry of the parterres and casting frosted topiary and the silhouettes of trees into beautiful relief

WORDS BY **STEPHANIE DONALDSON** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **RACHEL WARNE** 

### GARDENING





now has fallen on the gardens of Hatfield House countless times since the Cecil family laid out the grounds more than 400 years ago, when the 1st Earl of Salisbury acquired it as the result of a rather grand house swap. King James I took a liking to Theobalds, the Cecils' previous Hertfordshire home, and offered Hatfield in its place. Lord Salisbury immediately set about building a magnificent new house to replace the 13th-century Old Palace and employed the finest designers of the day to create the gardens, with John Tradescant as the first head gardener.

Nothing now remains of these - a casualty of what the current head gardener Alastair Gunn refers to as "the pendulum of interest" in gardening that has swung back and forth through successive generations of the Cecil family. Interest definitely ebbed in the late 17th and early 18th century, until the 1st Marchioness of Salisbury rather dramatically halted the decline by obliterating what remained of the garden altogether in accordance with the taste of the times for parkland rather than intricate knot gardens. Besides which, she wanted to be able to ride her horse from her door. Although viewed sometimes by garden historians as a bit of a vandal, in reality she was an innovator who took an old neglected garden and reinvented it. What we see today has waxed and waned over the centuries, beginning with the remaking of the terraces with its pierced brickwork balustrades by her son, the 2nd Marquis of Salisbury.

It's a delicate balancing act, handing down a garden from one generation to the next. When the Dowager Marchioness (mother of the present Lord Salisbury) lived at Hatfield House, she swept away the Victorian-style planting on the terraces and filled the flowerbeds with the historic varieties that she loved to collect. It was designed to be a spring and early summer garden, with the borders simply ticking over in late summer because she was



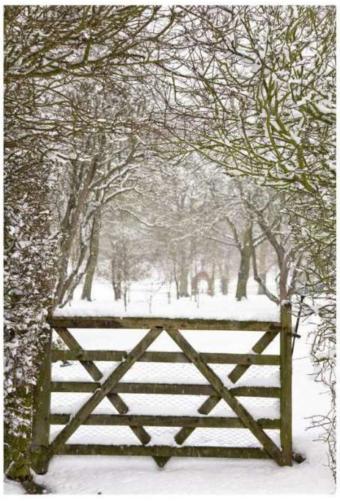
**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP** LEFT A turret at the corner of the south front; the gate to

the lime walk; iced euphorbia **OPPOSITE** The old palace garden with its central fountain



### GARDENING







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Portuguese laurels in pots line the approach to the deer park;

a rustic gate; snow-topped box OPPOSITE The south front; topiary in the west parterre

# Snow highlights the garden's structure

away in France from July to September each year. The current Lord and Lady Salisbury have worked with Alastair and his team to extend the season of interest and make the garden less labour-intensive, but their primary interest is the wider landscape with its many historic trees. A different focus allows them to be innovative but respectful of history and their predecessors.

What has always mattered, though, is how the garden is viewed from the house, especially the pleasing abstract patterns that appear when it is seen from above. This is particularly true when looking down on the snow-covered areas. The transformative effect of freshly fallen snow always thrills, and at Hatfield House it draws attention to the geometry of the parterres, the delicate filigree of the metalwork, the frosted topiary and the silhouettes of the trees, all brought into relief by the pure white background. The ephemeral nature of snow is part of its magic, especially that first crisp covering before it begins to thaw or footprints appear.

As lovely as the snow may be, it's not always good news for the gardeners at Hatfield, who find their timetable squeezed if it lasts beyond a few days. Routine tasks must be delayed and time taken to knock heavy snowfalls from evergreen hedges and topiary. Alastair found that the structural weaknesses of some of the hedges on the west parterre were revealed by the way they split open when weighed down by snow: they hadn't been cut back hard enough for several years prior to his arrival, so had developed horizontal growths that



collapsed. Drastic but restorative pruning in spring, which never appears very attractive when it is done and is quite slow to recover, was essential to ensure they look their best for years to come.

Early snowfall is particularly problematic for the horticultural team. They like to get all the borders mulched during the month before Christmas, but if the garden is covered for three out of the four weeks, this becomes impossible. Then there is the lime walk on the west parterre to be attended to – a lush green tunnel in summer, in winter it becomes a series of beautiful structural patterns. To keep it this crisp and controlled requires a concerted effort from all six gardeners, who spend two weeks in the run-up to Christmas pruning and tying it in. It is crucial to do this early in the season because the walk is underplanted with many bulbs and the job must be completed before any of them emerge.

Beyond the routine chores of winter, Alastair values the bigger picture that snowfall brings to the gardens at Hatfield House. "It's the time of year when you see the truth of things," he says. Even when work is held up, there's one enjoyable task that is never delayed – the gathering of seasonal greenery for the house. The estate provides it all, including the two trees that are felled from one of the Christmas-tree plantations. A lime avenue beyond the gardens is a rich source of mistletoe and there is an abundance of holly and ivy to be harvested – everything that is needed for one of the gardeners to decorate the fireplaces and some of the private rooms. And should there happen to be a fresh fall of snow, it will add the final festive flourish to Christmas at Hatfield House.





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From fruity puddings and a mouthwatering maple-glazed turkey to refreshing fizzy cocktails and savoury dishes with a twist... our menu offers ideas for every festive meal

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLARE WINFIELD
RECIPES AND FOOD STYLING BY ALISON WALKER
STYLING BY WEI TANG



### FOOD & DRINK

### PROSECCO, PASSIONFRUIT & GINGER COCKTAIL

Preparation 5 minutes Makes 6

Passionfruit purée and ginger syrup are available from most large supermarkets; alternatively, use the syrup from a jar of stem ginger.

6 tsp ginger syrup 6 tbsp passionfruit purée 1 bottle Prosecco fresh mint leaves, to garnish 1 tbsp passionfruit purée into 6 champagne flutes. Stir gently.

2 Top up with Prosecco and garnish with a





#### THREE EASY CANAPÉS

Preparation 45 minutes Cooking 10 minutes Makes about 55-60

This number of oatcakes will serve ten people with about six canapés each but is easily doubled if you have more guests.

#### FOR THE OATCAKES

140g fine oatmeal ¼ tsp baking powder 15g butter, melted FOR THE WALDORF CANAPÉS

small green apple, finely diced

15g toasted walnuts, chopped ½ stick celery, finely diced 1 tbsp plain full-fat yogurt Stilton, crumbled FOR THE SMOKED SALMON

50g smoked salmon, cut into very thin strips

CANAPÉS

4 tbsp soured cream salmon caviar eggs and dill, to garnish

FOR THE HUMMUS CANAPÉS

3 tbsp hummus ½ tbsp olive oil 25g chorizo, finely diced 1 tbsp tinned chickpeas

- First make the oatcakes. Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Line 2-3 large baking sheets with baking parchment.
- 2 Mix together the oatmeal, baking powder and a pinch
- of salt in a large bowl. Make a well in the centre and pour in the butter and about 75ml boiling water. Stir with a cutlery knife until the mixture clumps together. Bring together the mixture with your hands (it's easier if they're lightly coated with oatmeal) and transfer to a worksurface dusted with more oatmeal. Knead to bring together into a ball. Roll out the dough as thinly as possible (about 2mm). Cut out rounds with a 3.5-4cm cutter and transfer to the baking sheets. Bake for 7-10 minutes until golden. Cool on a wire rack. They will keep for up to 4 weeks
- in an airtight container. Just before serving, assemble the canapés. Mix together the apple, walnuts, celery and yogurt. Divide between one third of the oatcakes and garnish each with a piece of Stilton. Divide the smoked salmon between another third of the oatcakes. Top with a dollop of soured cream and a few salmon caviar eggs. Garnish with dill. Divide the hummus between the rest of the oatcakes. Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the chorizo and chickpeas for 2 minutes. Use to garnish the hummus, drizzling over some of the oil. Serve at once.

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#### CHRISTMAS PUDDING

*Preparation 25 minutes, plus macerating Cooking 6 hours Serves 8* This version of the Christmas classic uses butter rather than suet to help moisten the pudding. You can replace the liqueur with the same amount of whisky, rum or brandy if you prefer, but the cherry flavour does enhance its fruitiness.

85g frozen butter, plus extra for greasing 150g each sultanas, raisins and currants 55g dried dates, chopped 75g dried figs, chopped zest and juice 1 small orange 75ml cherry liqueur 2 tbsp dark rum 1 carrot, grated (about 75g) 75g candied peel 75g molasses sugar 1/2 tsp each freshly grated nutmeg, ground cardamom and ground ginger 110g fresh breadcrumbs 2 medium eggs, beaten

Orate the butter and leave overnight in the freezer or fridge. Put the dried fruit, zest and juice and cherry liqueur in a non-metallic bowl. Cover and then leave



- to macerate overnight.

  Grease a 1.2-litre pudding basin with butter. Lay a large square of foil on the worksurface and put a similar-sized piece of baking parchment on top. Make a concertina fold in the centre to allow for expansion.
- Put all of the remaining ingredients into a bowl. Stir

- in the dried fruit, plus any leftover liquid. Mix until combined, then tip into the basin, packing it down.
- Cover the basin with the baking parchment and foil (foil uppermost). Tie in place with a length of string, just under the rim, making a handle by bringing the lengths over the top of the bowl and tying them to the string on the other side.
- To cook the pudding, put an upturned heatproof saucer in the base of a deep pan. Set the basin on top. Pour in enough boiling water to reach halfway up the basin. Cover with a tight-fitting lid and simmer for 6 hours, topping up with boiling water if necessary.
- 6 Remove the pudding, cool, then store, with the foil and parchment still intact, in a dark place for a month.
- 7 To reheat, steam as before with the coverings in place for 2 hours until hot.

#### CHOCOLATE BARK

Preparation 15 minutes, plus setting Cooking 5 minutes Makes 400g

Most large supermarkets now have a good selection of food decorations in the baking aisle, so vary them to suit your taste.

flavourless oil, for greasing 350g plain chocolate, broken into pieces 25g white chocolate, broken into pieces

TO DECORATE

shelled pistachios, dried cranberries, milk chocolate drops, white chocolate stars, gold shimmer powder

- 1 Lightly oil a 16cm x 28cm traybake tin and line with baking parchment, making sure that the corners are squared and sharp.
- Put the plain chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Melt, stirring a couple of times, until smooth. Pour the chocolate into the tin and smooth to the corners with the back of a large spoon. Shake gently to remove swirls or air bubbles.
- Repeat the melting process with the white chocolate but don't stir until melted it seizes (clumps) easily.
- Now it's time to decorate like Jackson Pollock. Using a teaspoon, drizzle the white chocolate over the plain. Test a little first - the plain chocolate shouldn't be too liquid nor should it be set.
- Next, decorate with the nuts, fruit and chocolate drops.
  Again, check the consistency
   they should sit proud from the surface. Leave to harden in a cool place (but not the fridge).
- 6 Use a fine artist's paintbrush to dab the gold powder onto the chocolate. Serve as an after-Christmas lunch centrepiece or wrap in Cellophane and attach a festive label to give as a food gift.

#### SOUR CREAM MINCE PIES

*Preparation 35 minutes, plus chilling Cooking 20 minutes Makes 24* If you haven't had time to make your own mincemeat, use this recipe to jazz up a standard shop-bought version. But do try this pastry rather than ready-made, as its crumbly texture is worth the effort.

#### FOR THE FILLING

400g mincemeat zest 1 orange 2 tbsp orange liqueur 50g toasted pecan nuts, chopped

FOR THE PASTRY

350g plain flour 200g cold butter, diced 2 tbsp caster sugar 3-4 tbsp sour cream 1 medium egg, beaten

- Mix together the filling ingredients and leave to infuse.
- 2 To make the pastry, put the flour in a food processor and blitz in the butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Add the sugar. With the motor



running, gradually add the cream until the mixture starts to clump together. Transfer to a bowl and bring together with your fingertips to form a ball. Knead briefly until smooth. Shape into a disc, wrap in clingfilm and leave to rest

in a cool place for at least 20 minutes.

- Cut the pastry in half. On a lightly floured worksurface, roll out one half of the pastry to a 2mm thickness. Using a 7cm round pastry cutter, stamp out 24 circles and line 2x12-hole shallow bun tins.
- 4 Fill with mincemeat. Roll out the other piece of pastry and stamp out rounds using a 6cm round cutter.
- Brush the underside edges of the pastry tops with egg and top each pie with a lid, pressing to seal. Re-roll any trimmings and cut out stars or snowflakes to decorate. Brush the tops with beaten egg and chill for 30 minutes.
- 6 Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan oven) gas mark 6. Brush with more egg and bake for about 20 minutes until golden. Serve warm, dusted with icing sugar.





#### GLAZED MAPLE TURKEY WITH RYE AND CHERRY **STUFFING**

Preparation 4 utes Cooking 3 hours 30 minutes Serves 8 with lefto Use dark or light rye breadcrumbs depending on your preference - the latter will soak up more of the turkey's juices while cooking.

5kg turkey with giblets 1 large lemon a few bay leaves 2 large sprigs of thyme 1 onion, quartered 100g butter, softened 2 tbsp maple syrup mixed with 1 tbsp bourbon, to glaze FOR THE STUFFING

50g butter 200g onions, finely chopped 125g fresh rye breadcrumbs 100g dried sour cherries, chopped leaves from a large sprig of thyme zest of ½ lemon

- 1 First make the stuffing. Do this on Christmas Eve, if you prefer. Melt the butter in a medium pan over a low heat and cook the onion gently for 10 minutes.
- 2 Stir in the remaining stuffing ingredients and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Set aside to cool while preparing the turkey.
- 3 Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Remove the giblets from the turkey - these can be used to make stock. Fill the neck end with the stuffing, then pull the neck flap down and secure with a couple of skewers. Squeeze the lemon and sprinkle the juice over the turkey. Put the lemon halves in the body cavity along with the herbs and onion. Smear the butter all over the turkey. Weigh the bird and calculate the cooking time, allowing 20 minutes per 450g plus

20 minutes, plus 30 minutes resting. Sit the turkey in a large roasting pan. 4 Roast for 3 hours 20 minutes (basting every half hour) until the juices run clear when a skewer is inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. If you have a meat thermometer, the breast

should be at least 74°C and the thigh 82°C. Brush with maple syrup glaze for the last 10 minutes of cooking. 6 Once cooked, leave to rest for at least 30 minutes (and up to an hour) loosely covered in foil and a couple of tea towels. Serve on a warmed platter.

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#### YULE LOG STUFFING

Preparation 35 minutes Cooking 1 hour 10 minutes Serves 8 This easy-to-slice stuffing log can be prepared 24 hours in advance and cooked when needed.

25g butter 1 medium onion, finely chopped 200g vacuum-packed peeled chestnuts 450g pork sausagemeat 2 tbsp freshly chopped sage 2 tsp fennel seeds, coarsely crushed zest 1 lemon and ½ orange 1 tbsp Calvados 1 medium egg, beaten 12-15 rashers streaky bacon, smoked or unsmoked (at least 20cm long)

- Melt the butter in a medium pan over a low heat and cook the onion gently for 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.
- Finely chop or pulse the chestnuts in a food processor. Tip into a bowl and add the remaining

- ingredients (except for the bacon) and the cooled onion. Season with freshly ground black pepper and 1 tsp salt. Fry a heaped teaspoon of the mixture in a little oil until golden and cooked through. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.
- Lay the bacon on a board and stretch each rasher with the back of a knife until 30cm long.
- Put a 45cm x 35cm piece of baking parchment on the worksurface. Arrange the rashers in the centre of the paper across its width, slightly overlapping each other to make a 30cm x 30cm square.
- Place the sausagemeat evenly along one length of the rasher nearest to you, patting it roughly into a log shape. Using the paper, roll up the bacon tightly around the mixture, making sure the seam is underneath (secure with a skewer if you like). Tuck the paper ends under and wrap the log in a layer of foil. Chill for

- 30 minutes or overnight. Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Put the foil-wrapped log onto a baking sheet and cook for 45 minutes.
- Carefully unwrap the foil and baking parchment and drain off the fat and cooking juices. Discard the wrapping and return the log to the baking sheet. Bake for 10-15 minutes until golden. Leave for 10 minutes, then slice to serve.

#### PARSNIP, SAGE AND **HAZELNUT GRATIN**

Preparation 25 minutes Cooking 1 hour Serves 8 This gratin is very forgiving so can be cooked in advance, then reheated the next day while your turkey is resting.

25g butter, plus extra for greasing 1 small onion, finely sliced 1 garlic clove, crushed 1kg large parsnips, peeled 300ml double cream 100ml crème fraîche 400ml whole milk 1 tsp Dijon mustard

2 tbsp finely chopped fresh sage, plus extra to garnish freshly grated nutmeg 3 tbsp grated Parmesan 25g toasted hazelnuts, roughly chopped

- Heat the oven to 170°C (150°C fan oven) gas mark 3. Grease a deep 19cm x 24cm ovenproof dish (or one of similar dimensions).
- Melt the butter in a medium pan and gently fry the onion and garlic for 15 minutes until softened.
- Thinly slice the parsnips with a mandolin or sharp knife.
  - Pour the cream, crème fraîche and milk into the onion pan. Add the mustard, sage and nutmeg, then season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Bring to a simmer, add the parsnips and turn into the baking dish. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake for 35-45 minutes until golden. Cover with foil if it starts to brown too quickly. Leave for 10 minutes, then garnish with sage and the hazelnuts.



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the middle

and thickly sliced through

plain yogurt, to serve

(optional)

sugar and serve with the

fruit and yogurt.

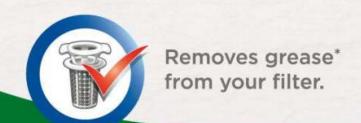
and leave to cool. Use at







Clean the toughest food first time.





LOVES THE IMPOSSIBLE

#### FOOD & DRINK



#### TURKISH DELIGHT PARFAIT WITH CARAMEL CLEMENTINES

Preparation 30 minutes, plus freezing Cooking 5 minutes Serves 6-8 Inspired by Edmund's love of Turkish delight in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, this creamy dessert is a light alternative to traditional Christmas pudding.

225g granulated sugar 2 medium egg whites 300ml whipping cream 1 tsp vanilla extract 175g Turkish delight, cubed FOR THE CARAMEL CLEMENTINES

125g caster sugar 100ml cold water 4 clementines, peeled and thickly sliced horizontally into 3-4 pieces pistachios or toasted flaked almonds, to garnish

- Dampen a 900ml loaf tin with water and line with clingfilm, overlapping the edges.
- Dissolve the granulated sugar in a small pan with 150ml water over a gentle heat. Boil the syrup to 120°C (firm-ball stage).
- Meanwhile, whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks. In a separate bowl, whisk the cream until it just softly peaks - it shouldn't be stiff as you want to loosen the meringue mixture later.
- Whisk the hot sugar syrup into the egg whites and continue until the mixture

is cooled - it's easier to do otherwise ask someone else to pour while you whisk.

- Fold one large spoonful of cream into the meringue to loosen the mixture. Fold in the remainder, followed by the vanilla extract and the Turkish delight.
- Spoon the ice cream into the loaf tin and level with the back of a spoon. Cover with the clingfilm and freeze overnight until firm.
- To make the caramel clementines, put the sugar in a small pan and heat to dissolve until it turns liquid. Turn up the heat slightly and cook until golden. Add the water at arm's length (it will splutter) and simmer until syrupy. Put the fruit into a bowl and pour over the caramel. Cover and leave to stand overnight in a cool place but not the fridge.
- Remove the parfait from the freezer 20 minutes before serving and turn out onto a cold plate. Just before serving, pile some of the clementines on top and drizzle with some caramel sauce (serve the rest separately). Garnish with the nuts.

#### CAMARGUE RICE, this in a free-standing mixer; LEEK AND MUSHROOM STRUDEL

Preparation 40 minutes Cooking 1 hour Serves 6 Grown in the wetlands of southern France, Camargue red rice has an intense nutty flavour and chewy texture.

100g Camargue rice 375ml hot vegetable stock 2 tbsp olive oil 450g leeks, finely chopped celery salt (or sea salt) 150g chestnut mushrooms, finely sliced 11/2 tbsp medium sherry leaves from a sprig of thyme 130g Stilton, crumbled 1 medium egg, beaten 4 sheets filo, each measuring 42cm x 24cm 50g butter, melted sesame seeds, for sprinkling

- Put the rice in a pan with the stock. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 25 minutes until tender but with some bite.
- Meanwhile, heat half the oil in a sauté pan and gently fry the leeks for 20 minutes with a large pinch of celery salt. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside in a large bowl.
- Heat the remaining oil in the pan; sauté the mushrooms

until golden and the liquid they produce while cooking has evaporated. Add the sherry and bubble until the liquid disappears. Tip the mushrooms into the leeks. Heat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan oven) gas mark 5. Drain the rice and cool by spreading onto a large plate or tray. Stir into the leeks along with the thyme leaves and cheese. Season with freshly ground black pepper. Stir in the beaten egg until well combined.

- Lay a sheet of filo on the worksurface and brush liberally with melted butter. Lay another sheet on top and brush with more butter. Repeat with the remaining sheets.
- Lay the filling along the long end of the filo nearest to you, leaving a 2cm border. Roll up the filo, firmly tucking the short ends in as you do so. Transfer to a baking sheet, seam side down, and brush all over with more butter. Sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake for 30-35 minutes until golden brown and the filling is piping hot. Cut into thick slices to serve.



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# CL PROMOTION

#### FESTIVE CHOCOLATE ICE-CREAM YULE LOG

Preparation 30 minutes, plus cooling Cooking 12 minutes
Makes 12 slices

Chocolate lovers will enjoy this rich, delicious dessert.

125g caster sugar, plus extra to dust 3 large eggs 100g self-raising flour 25g cocoa powder 900ml tub Carte D'Or Gelateria Chocolate Inspiration ice cream FOR THE ICING

75g dark chocolate, chopped into pieces 100g unsalted butter, softened 125g icing sugar, plus extra to dust

- Preheat oven to 180°C (160°C fan) mark 4. Line a 33cm x 23cm Swiss roll tin with baking parchment. In a large bowl, whisk the caster sugar and eggs with an electric whisk until thick and fluffy (about 10 minutes). Sieve over the flour and cocoa. Fold in, being careful not to knock out too much of the air. Pour into the prepared tin and gently smooth the surface. Bake for 10-12 minutes until just firm.
- Place a piece of baking parchment, larger than the sponge, onto a worksurface

- and dust with caster sugar (to prevent sticking). Invert the sponge onto the baking parchment, lift off the tin and peel away the lining paper. Cover the sponge with a tea towel and leave to cool. Soften the ice cream for 15 minutes in the fridge.
- When the sponge is cool, spread the softened ice cream over it (leaving a small border to prevent spillage). Using the baking parchment to help, roll the sponge up tightly. Trim the ends, then wrap the roll tightly in the baking parchment and freeze while you make the icing.
- For the icing, gently melt the chocolate, then set aside to cool to room temperature (about 15-20 minutes). Beat the butter and icing sugar to a creamy consistency, then beat in the cooled chocolate. Spread the yule log with the icing, using a fork to create a wood effect. Freeze on a tray for at least 6 hours. To serve, leave at room temperature for 10-15 minutes to soften slightly, then dust with icing sugar.





#### CARTE D'OR ICE CREAM COCKTAIL PUDDINGS

For each serving, in a small jug mix 100ml milk and 1 tbsp each spiced rum and coffee liqueur. Place in the fridge to chill. To serve, pour into a martini glass and scoop in a ball of Carte D'Or Gelateria Salted Caramel ice cream. Serve with chocolate-coated biscuits or wafer rolls and a spoon.

Visit cartedorscoop.co.uk for further information on the Carte D'Or collection, including the Classic and Gelateria ranges. Carte D'Or Vanilla, Gelateria Chocolate Inspiration and Strawberry have all been awarded the prestigious Good Housekeeping Institute Approved Endorsement.

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# Presents from the pantry







melted chocolate, stirring

until smooth. Allow the

#### CINNAMON POPCORN

Preparation 5 minutes
Cooking 10 minutes
Makes about 175g
Package in paper bags and decorate with hand-written labels for a fun stocking filler.

3 tbsp sunflower oil 125g popcorn kernels 50ml maple syrup ½ tsp salt 1-1½ tsp ground cinnamon

- Heat the oil in a heavybased pan over a medium to high heat. Drop in a kernel of popcorn and when it has popped, add the rest, plus the maple syrup. Cover with a tight-fitting lid.
- 2 Cook, shaking and swirling the pan but always keeping it on the heat. The popcorn

should start popping after a couple of minutes. Don't be tempted to take the lid off but when the noise slows right down to an occasional pop, remove from the heat and leave for a couple of minutes.

- Tip the popcorn into a very large bowl and shake so that any unpopped kernels drop to the bottom. While it is still hot, sprinkle over the salt and cinnamon and stir thoroughly to coat.
- 4 Tip the popcorn onto a large baking sheet lined with parchment and leave to cool - any unpopped kernels can be removed.
- Once cold, pack the popcorn into paper bags and seal with a festive label. It will keep for a few days in a cool, dry place.

#### SLOE GIN TRUFFLES

(shown on previous page)
Preparation 5 minutes
Cooking 15 minutes
Makes about 24

Put the truffles into petit-four cases and present them in an attractive vintage box or tin.

100ml double cream
250g dark chocolate, broken
into pieces
2 tbsp sloe gin
1 tsp vanilla extract
cocoa powder, for dusting

- Pour the cream into a small pan and bring to the boil.
- 2 Put the chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of barely simmering water. Leave to melt, stirring once or twice until smooth.

Pour the cream into the

mixture to cool to room temperature before adding the sloe gin and vanilla. Beat (using beaters, not a whisk) until the mixture lightens in colour and looks fluffier. Chill for 10 minutes or so to firm before forming the truffles. Sift a thick layer of cocoa powder onto a tray lined with baking parchment and cover another with petit-four cases. Using two teaspoons, drop small, evenly sized blobs of the chocolate mixture into the cocoa. Dust your fingers with cocoa and quickly roll each one into a ball, roll it

in more cocoa and place

inside the cases.



#### FOOD & DRINK

#### ROSE-PETAL CHAI TEABAGS

Preparation 5 minutes
Makes 16 teabags

Dried rose petals are available in larger Waitrose stores or you can order them online from waitrose.com or steenbergs.co.uk.

4 tbsp loose black tea leaves, preferably Assam
4 tsp dried rose petals
1 level tsp ground cardamom
1 level tsp ground ginger
½ tsp freshly ground black
pepper

- Mix all of the ingredients together in a small bowl.
- 2 Cut out 16 rectangles (20cm x 10cm) of muslin. Fold in half widthways and, from a central point, machine or hand-sew diagonally down both sides.
- Put a heaped teaspoon of the tea mixture into each

bag and sew closed. Wrap individually in Cellophane or arrange in a vintage tin or box. The bags will keep for up to three months in an airtight container or cool, dark cupboard. The flavours and scent will inevitably start to fade, so they should ideally be used within a month for the best flavour. Inside the tin include a handwritten note on how to make chai tea: put one of the teabags into a small pan with a cup of water. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 10 minutes. Remove the teabag, then add 125ml water. Return to the boil, then pour into a cup. (Alternatively, for a herbal/spice-style black tea, simply brew the teabags for a couple of minutes in boiling water straight from the kettle.)

#### LEMON AND VANILLA HEARTS

Preparation 30 minutes, plus chilling Cooking 12 minutes
Makes 14

These biscuits can be threaded onto string and hung on the tree or on twiggy arrangements.

125g butter, softened zest of 1 lemon 55g caster sugar 1 medium egg yolk 1 tsp vanilla extract 150g plain flour 35g cornflour 50g ground almonds

- Beat together the butter,
   zest, sugar, egg yolk and
   vanilla extract until fluffy
   and lighter in colour.
   Sift together the remaining
- ingredients, then blend
  into the butter mixture to
  make a dough. Turn out
  onto a lightly floured
  worksurface and knead until

smooth. Flatten into a disc. wrap in clingfilm and chill until firm enough to roll. Roll out the dough between 2 sheets of baking parchment to a 5mm thickness. Stamp out 14 heart shapes using a 7.5cm cutter, rerolling the trimmings if necessary. Using a skewer, make small holes near the tops of the hearts for threading onto string later. Transfer to 2 baking sheets and chill for 20 minutes until firm. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4 Bake the biscuits for 10-12 minutes until lightly golden at the edges. Leave to sit on the baking sheets for a couple of minutes to firm up before transferring to wire racks to cool. If the holes have closed up slightly during cooking, make them larger again while the biscuits are still hot.



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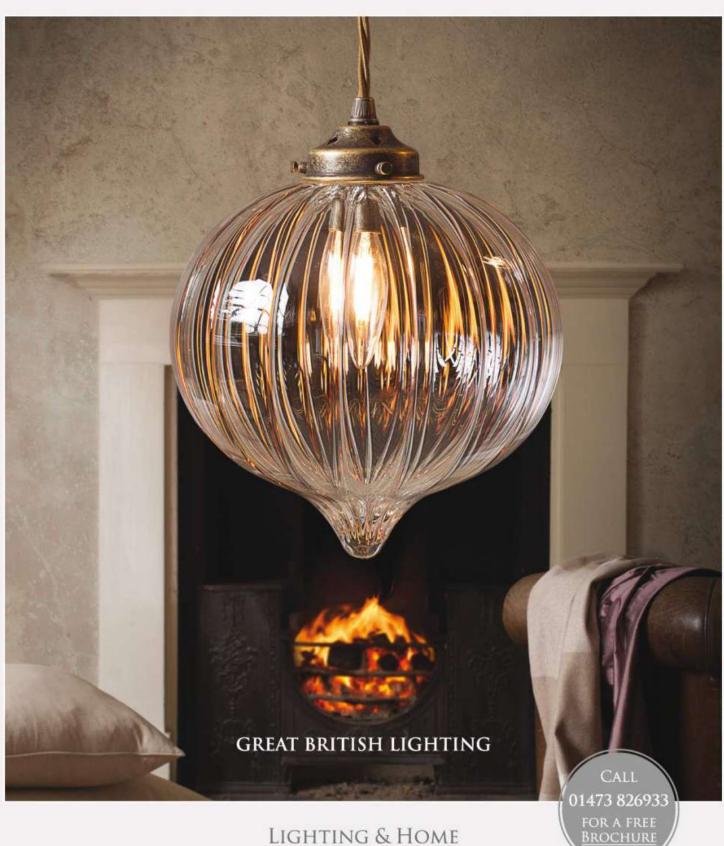
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For a truly merry Christmas, perhaps we should live a little more like the Danish, who consistently top the polls as the happiest nation. With winters that are colder and darker than here, the Danes embrace the concept of 'hygge'. Pronounced 'hooga', it means creating a warm atmosphere and glow inside the house, and enjoying the simple things in life with favourite people – perfect for the festive season. "Hygge is about togetherness and belonging, and connecting with family and friends," explains Meik Wiking, CEO of The Happiness Research Institute, Denmark. "Our research shows that satisfaction with social relationships is one of the best predictors of general happiness levels." So light that fire, pour a glass of mulled wine and enjoy the festive hygge in your home this Christmas.



#### TREAT YOURSELF

It's unlikely that mud is currently on your present list, but it will be after a trip to the Verbena Spa at the Feversham Arms Hotel in Helmsley, North Yorkshire. The Glorious Mud treatment (£75, 60 minutes) starts with brisk brushing from head to toe to stimulate the circulation, then warm mud is slathered on. Rich in minerals, it nourishes the skin and the heat draws out impurities. Cocooned with only your head showing, you are then given a scalp massage while the mud does its work. After rinsing, skin feels soft and looks radiant. Finish with afternoon tea in this former coaching inn, or take a country walk and enjoy the mud on your boots, too. <code>Dbl B&B from £120 (0800 089 3929; prideofbritainhotels.com)</code>.

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#### MIDDLE-OF-THE-NIGHT PANICS ABOUT PRESENTS AND COOKING THE TURKEY

are common at this time of year, so ensure you get a good night's sleep by sipping a cup of Kentish Sleepy Tea, made with a soporific blend of hops, camomile and lavender, before bedtime (£4.25, hopshop.co.uk). KEEP COLD AND FLU BUGS AWAY WITH A spritz of new Neal's Yard Remedies Organic Defence Hand Spray (£6.50, nealsyardremedies.com). Witch hazel, thyme, lemongrass and nialou essential oil kill bacteria and provide an uplifting scent. WITH SO MANY PEOPLE CUTTING OR REDUCING THEIR GLUTEN INTAKE,

there's sure to be at least one such person at your Christmas table, but with *Gloriously Gluten Free* by Susanna Booth (Hamlyn, £20), you'll have plenty of delicious and nutritious recipes to serve up. *For more tips and products, visit netdoctor.co.uk.* 

#### NATURE'S MEDICINE CABINET

Cocoa It's the news you want to hear at Christmas - there are health benefits to chocolate. The antioxidant polyphenols in cocoa hold the key, as they are thought to help immunity and heart health. If you're suffering from a tickly cough, you could try chocolate one study found theobromine, in cocoa, was as effective as many cough medicines. Antioxidants are more plentiful in dark chocolate. and higher still in cocoa powder or cacao nibs, the dried and lessprocessed versions of the beans used to make the confectionery. Avoid the sugar of milk chocolate



DECEMBER 2015 🚅 171

# Awinningsmile

Give your teeth and gums a little extra care to keep them healthy by introducing TePe Interdental Brushes into your daily routine

ooking good can help us feel good about ourselves, and there's nothing like having a beautiful smile to boost our confidence. Although we all know how important it is to take care of our teeth with regular visits to the dentist and hygienist, we don't always manage to follow this up with a proper dental health regime. Using TePe Interdental Brushes on a daily basis, however, makes this much easier and gives great results. With shaped handles, plastic-coated wires for safe and gentle cleaning, and sizes to fit most interdental spaces, the brushes help to reduce the build-up of plaque, preventing gum disease and tooth decay, as well as bad breath.

Toothbrushing alone cleans only up to 60 per cent of your teeth, but TePe Interdental Brushes are especially good for hard-to-reach places in your mouth, removing plaque from the remaining 40 per cent. The TePe Angle brush has a longer handle, too, to enable even better access to your back teeth. Incorporating TePe Interdental Brushes into your dental routine offers a simple way to ensure healthy teeth and gums, as well as a wonderful smile.



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It could be time to rethink all you want for Christmas – the latest research shows that the best gifts for your health and happiness are not those left under the tree but something you can experience instead

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER

re you putting together a wish list for this festive season? Make sure 'experiences', not 'stuff', are at the top. Research shows that we are increasingly viewing material items as cumbersome and stressful, and that it is the things we do, such as learning a new skill or spending quality time with family or friends, that bring real contentment. A study at the University of Colorado found that life experiences made people much happier than receiving new things.

The idea of 'having' over 'doing' has long been accompanied by a health warning – most religions have something to say about not placing importance on material things – but it has recently returned to the spotlight. Earlier this year, in his book *Stuffocation\** (a word he coined for the anxiety suffered by those with too many possessions), James Wallman explained: "Rather than helping us to feel good, materialism is making millions of us feel joyless, anxious and, even worse, depressed." Now, people are increasingly turning away from the consumption that characterised the 20th century, and responding with what Wallman describes as an "experience revolution". What's more, science is beginning to back the theory that this will not only make us happier, but healthier, too.

#### A GIFT THAT KEEPS GIVING

Toddlers are not the only ones who grow tired of their new toys soon after the packaging is unwrapped. In our materialistic society, the enjoyment we get from having this season's bag or the latest kitchen gadget can fade just as fast. "Material consumption can become like an addiction – the more you have of it, the more you need to achieve the same hit," says Dr Paul Dolan, behavioural scientist and author of *Happiness by Design\**. As a result, we can feel stifled by our possessions. "For most psychological mindsets," explains Dr Becky Spelman from The Private Therapy Clinic, "the more physical objects we own, the less free we feel."

The habit of seeking instant gratification from belongings can even alter our biochemistry and make us feel depressed. "Shopping boosts dopamine levels, in a similar way to drinking coffee," says Dr Nerina Ramlakhan, neurophysiologist and author of *Tired but Wired\*\**. "But it only gives a short-term boost, and can leave us feeling guilty." In contrast, the enjoyment we get from an activity has a longer shelf life. The key is to ask for something that will help you achieve a particular aim. "Are you after a new computer because you want the latest model, or is it because you can start on that book you've always wanted to write?" Dr Ramlakhan adds.

The enjoyment we get from an activity that we can savour has a much longer shelf life





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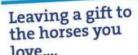


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Just as important as the experience is who you share it with. We are physically wired to thrive on relationships, which is why connecting with people you like – whether it's a busy Christmas party or a quiet tipple with your best friend – will leave you feeling emotionally uplifted. "There are parts of the brain that have been built for socialisation," Dr Ramlakhan explains. "Forming deeper connected relationships with other humans is fundamental to our health – if all you do is interact by 'liking' things on social media, you are not truly connecting, and are missing out on an important human need." The good news is that, with family and friends in the festive spirit, Christmas is the perfect time to get those mood-boosting experiential highs for little more than the price of a mince pie and cup of tea.

#### GET A FESTIVE HIGH FOR FREE

#### Stargazing

The feeling of awe from staring at the vastness of a clear, starry sky can strike an important chord for our wellbeing and may even affect our perception of time. A study by Stanford University found that when people experience this, they are more likely to feel that they're rich in time.

Enjoy a Christmas sing-along Raise your voices and your spirits by taking part in a local carol service or

simply belting out some classics at home

with friends. "Group singing is a great way of channelling a shared joy, which increases your happiness in an instant," says psychologist Dr Becky Spelman.

#### Give back

Volunteer at a local shelter or simply invite a lonely neighbour for a glass of mulled wine, and you'll not only benefit from the 'helper's high', but give your health a boost, too. "The old adage that it's better to give than receive turns out to be supported by the evidence," says psychologist Tony Crabbe, author of *Busy* (Piatkus, £14.99). "Research into altruism has persistently shown benefits to health, happiness and psychological wellbeing."

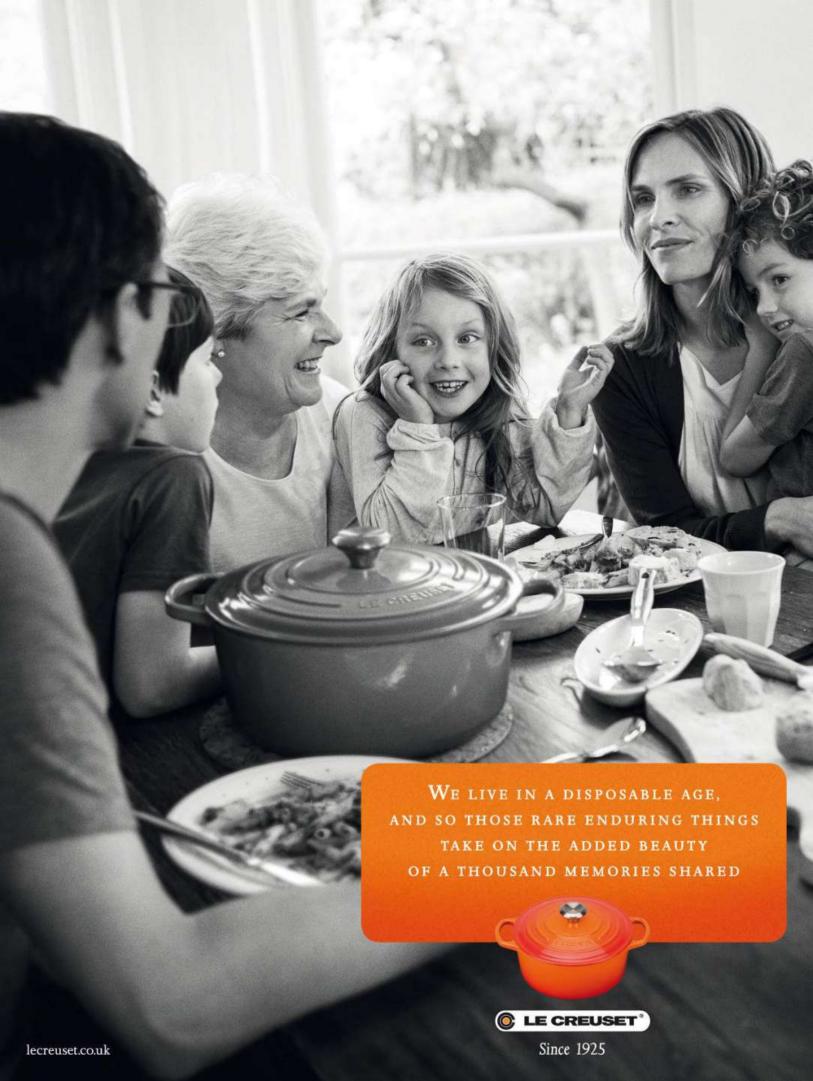
#### Cut the clutter

Pledge to donate, recycle or sell one unwanted possession for every present your family receives, and enjoy a lighter heart and an orderly New Year. "By losing clutter, we open up our minds to future possibilities rather than being weighed down by the past," Dr Spelman says.



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## ANEW LOOK FOR OUR STYLISH SOFA

The *Country Living* Gower range from DFS now comes in a smart corner sofa to suit both contemporary and traditional interiors

THE GOWER SOFA MADE BY DFS for *Country Living* is a classic design featuring brushed cotton/linen union upholstery and with a wonderfully comfortable but elegant shape. Three sizes are available – medium, large and grand – and the collection also includes a matching footstool. This month we are introducing a stylish new addition to the sofa collection: a luxuriously comfortable corner version (shown above) that is perfect for relaxing on by the fireside and will work equally well in a traditional or modern setting. The fabric range for the Gower now includes 18 stripes, 12 plains, 11 velvets, seven checks, five plaids and three shades of leather. All the furniture is made in the UK, with frames crafted from hardwoods, cushions designed for comfort and durability, and feet that have been turned from hardwoods, including beech and oak. For more information about the *Country Living* range at DFS, visit dfs.co.uk/countryliving.

sage Racing plain fabric, £2,298, Country Living Collection exclusively available at DFS. Cushions, from a selection, Donna Flower. Wool throw, £75; Guy lamp, £125; purple bottle, £16: all French Connection. Vintage crate, £26; bucket, £38: both Hen & Hammock. Westfire Uniq 35 stove,

Gower corner sofa in

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indigo and camel in women's sizes 6-22 and in camel, charcoal and navy in men's sizes 36-52in. Price from £170

The short version uses a warm doublesided superior wool-mix fabric with distinctive interior checks, and is shaped with a more flattering slimmer fit. The coat retains all the classic duffle features - a three-piece hood that folds flat on the shoulders, large slanted pockets, genuine buffalo-horn toggles, leather loop fastenings and an inside wallet pocket. It is available in eight stylish colours for women: camel, navy, charcoal, red, olive, burgundy and baby blue in sizes 8-20, and in camel, navy, charcoal and olive in sizes 36-48in for men. Price from £135



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This gardener's diary has a seasonal recipe for every month, lots of sowing and growing tips, a list of important gardening jobs, year-planners and plenty of space to write your appointments and notes.

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## WINTER FASHION **IDEAS**

Save 10% on Adini's clothing collection and find stylish items to take you through the season

#### TRISPEN JACKET (NBW143)

Available in forest green (shown), aubergine and midnight; S-L1 (12-18); length 60cm. **CL price £91.80** (usually £102) Marwood dress (CTW4081) Available in storm; XS-L3 (10-22); length 96cm. CL price £48.60 (usually £54) Hana leggings (CL506) Available in navy (shown), ash, black, charcoal, mocha and storm; XS-L2 (10-20); length 70cm (inside seam). CL price £18.90 (usually £21) Berlin beanie (AWH3) Available in petrol; one size.

CL price £18 (usually £20) Tangle belt (AWB1) Available in tan (shown) and slate grey; length 106cm. CL price £36 (usually £40)





#### OPERA DRESS (HSP4129)

Available in charcoal (shown) and aubergine; XS-L3 (10-22); length 105cm. CL price £47.25 (usually £52.50)

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#### NENE TUNIC (HSP6047)

Available in teal (shown) and blueberry; XS-L3 (10-22); length 82cm. CL price £42.53 (usually £47.25) Ravello cardigan (NK7008) Available in oyster (shown), black, navy and paprika; S/M, M/L, L/L1, L1/L2 (12/14, 14/16, 16/18, 18/20); length 60cm. CL price £49.95 (usually £55.50) Slim jeans (SDJ516) Available in dark navy; XS-L2 (10-20); length 78cm (inside seam). CL price £40.50 (usually £45)

Colmar scarf (AWS2) Available in natural; one size (18cm x 225cm).

CL price £35.10 (usually £39)

size (65cm x 175cm). CL price £15.53 (usually £17.25)

Huffle bag (AWG2) Available in forest green (shown) and black leather; approximately 30cm (length) and 14cm (width). CL price £89.10 (usually £99)



TO ORDER

Call 020 8090 0331\*, quoting CLPNV, or visit adinionline.co.uk and enter the voucher code CLPNV when requested. 🚍



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# **Seasonal style** Keep cosy this Christmas



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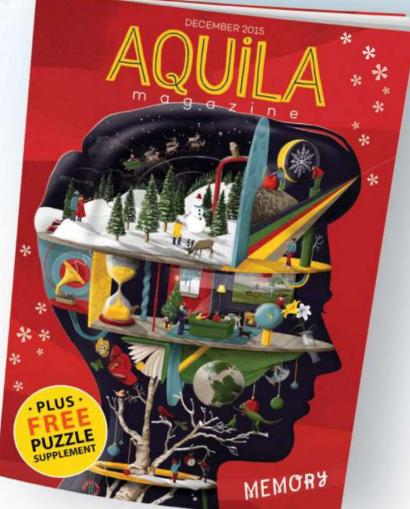
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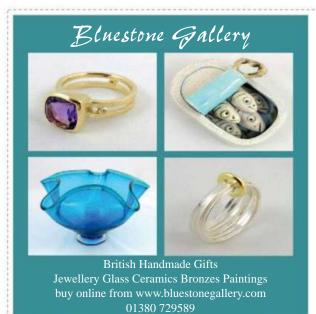
























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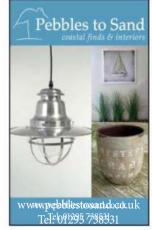
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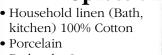


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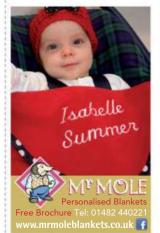


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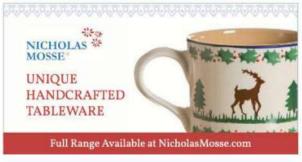




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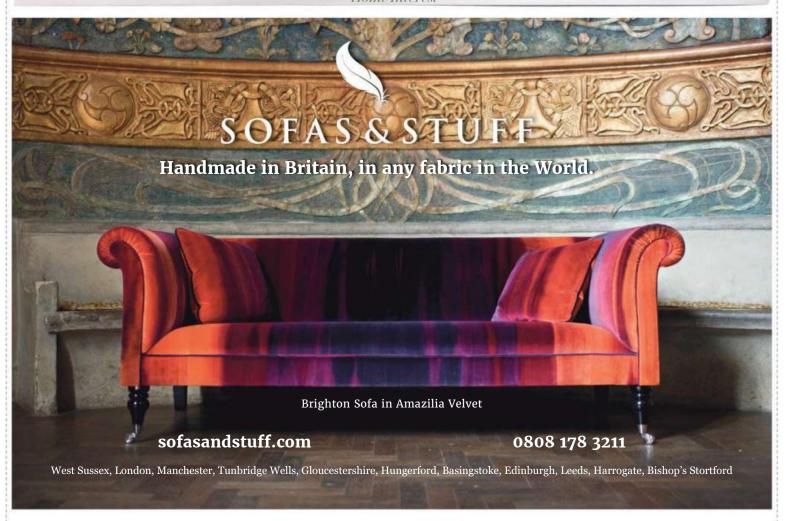


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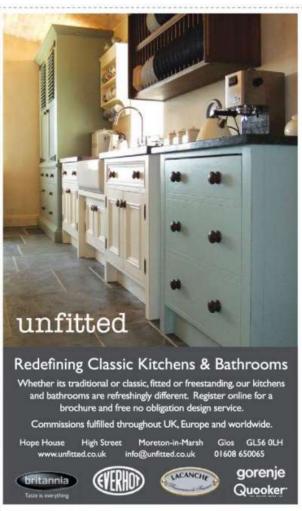
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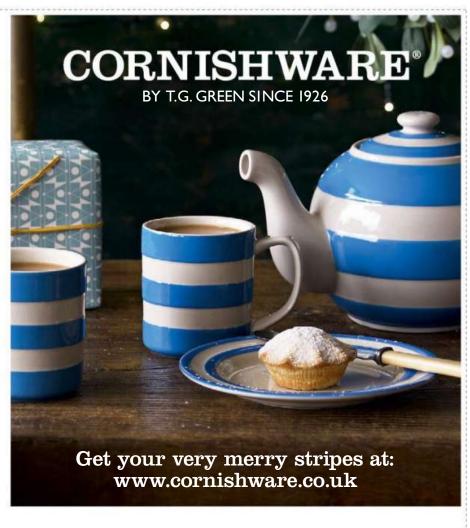


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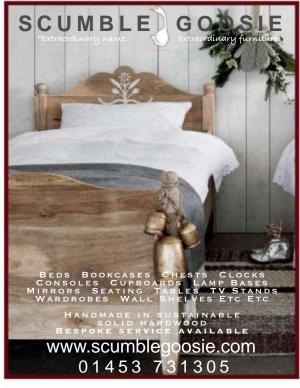




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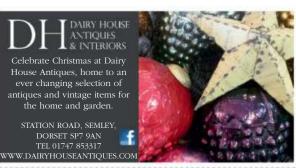
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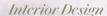






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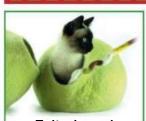
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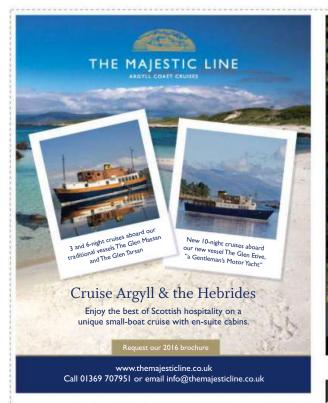
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# CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Since moving to England from Africa, Richard has grown to appreciate the beauty of winter and the 'patchwork quilt' of the British landscape

# MY COUNTRYSIDE RICHARD E GRANT

The actor on his favourite Christmas scents and the lure of rural Herefordshire

I am an avowed Christmas-aholic and always buy a 12-foot tree on the first of **December** - the smell of the conifer is wonderful. Especially as it mingles with the combination of scents emanating from the Aga on Christmas Day; turkey, pigs-in-blankets, Christmas pudding, cinnamon, gravy, red cabbage, mince pies and bread sauce are olfactory nirvana. A perfect Christmas Day for me starts with stockings at dawn in bed with my family followed by an early breakfast, present opening, a walk in Richmond Park while the turkey cooks, late lunch, Christmas pudding, TV seen through a food coma, then late-night leftovers and more pudding if it's not all gone. The first time I saw snow was in Swaziland in 1963 when I was six.

Our school was closed for the day, and the excitement and shock of seeing and playing in it was unforgettable. No matter how much people complain about snow, it still seems magical to me. The quality of silence when it blankets the countryside is extraordinary.

From the air, which is how I first saw it, the British patchwork-quilt

landscape is unique and unmistakable.

The sheer variety of the colour green is what distinguishes it for me: that and the neatly parcelled-up countryside. After landing in London in spring 1982, friends took me to Haslemere in Surrey. Walking in the woods and being assured there were no dangerous snakes in the undergrowth made it a memorable introduction.

Filming Twelfth Night in and around Padstow in Cornwall was a culinary and visual treat. I remember waking

up to the smell of sea air and the lure of Rick Stein's restaurant every evening. However, the weather proved a 'challenge' to the production company, as it was meant to look like early autumn and very often we were thwarted by weather fronts that came out of nowhere, deluged with downpours and instant fog. The abandoned cottage in Wet Sleddale in Cumbria, which was the set for Uncle Monty's house in Withnail and I, is one of the most unusual locations I've filmed in. It was chosen because it has the highest rainfall of anywhere in the country - something the director wanted for the look of the film. However, the summer of 1986 turned out to be one of the driest on record, so they had to bring in rain and smoke machines! According to everyone I have spoken to, Highclere in Hampshire, where I joined the cast of *Downton Abbey*, has a micro-climate of its own. In other words, it's always colder than anywhere close by. It was permanent 'goosebump' weather, so filming there in spring required long johns.

The mix of around the more attractive. The speed at which a lot of people drive around the narrow lanes.

fast, but I reckon it's as gorgeous as gorgeous gets as a place to retreat to from all things urban. The bookshops and literary

festival at Hay-on-Wye make it doubly seductive.

\*\*O Richard's new fragrance, Jack Covent Garden, is available from selfridges.com.

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Editor-in-chief,
Country Living Magazine

# CONTENTS

- Decorations to MAKE
- Christmas COUNTDOWN
- 6 Gifts from the KITCHEN
- 24 Ideas to INSPIRE

  Co-ordinating editor Louise Elliott

Art director Darren Holdway
Picture editor Patricia Taylor
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#### ADVENT CALENDAR GARLAND

Sew 24 drawstring bags from a collection of fabrics in similar jolly tones. For the numbers, use a stencil with emulsion or fabric paint applied to a small piece of vintage linen cloth and sew onto the bag. Fill each one with a sweet treat or small toy. Run a length of ribbon through a hem at the top of every bag and tie them onto a length of string for a fresh take on a traditional advent calendar.

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#### DECORATIONS TO MAKE



#### TABLE-SETTING IDEA

Glue an old photo onto a piece of card and embellish with a vintage button and length of lace. Write a menu on the reverse.



Paper crafting is an easy and inexpensive way to make beautiful decorations. Using hand-drawn templates, cut out a mix of different leaf

#### **LEAF GARLAND**

shapes from plain card or paper, or try scraps of wrapping paper with a suitable pattern such as this bark design. Punch a hole in the top of each leaf and string the leaves along a length of twine to decorate a shelf or mirror. Hang fairy lights behind to illuminate.



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#### STOCKING FILLERS

Turn a paper bag into pretty packaging by using a decorative punch around the top edge. Stick lace tape along the bottom, fill, scrunch and tie with ribbon.



#### **CHRISTMAS TABLE LINEN**

Turn remnants of fabric into colourful napkins that fit with your overall festive scheme. Cut out a piece of material to a suitable size, hem the edges and then add ric rac ribbon around all the sides. For an even more individual look, use fabrics in different patterns but

similar shades for each napkin. To finish, tie a sprig of fresh rosemary or eucalyptus with a toning ribbon and place on top.

# YOU WILL NEED: Scraps of favourite fabrics and pieces of leftover wrapping paper Selection of patterned papers and card Decorative hole punch Natural finds and fresh herbs Ribbons and twine

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#### WINTER WREATH

Weave wisteria twigs into a circle or use a willow base.
Embellish with dried lavender, berries, herbs, moss,
pine cones and bright Chinese lanterns.

#### DECORATIONS TO MAKE



#### FESTIVE HEART

Thread crab apples onto a length of wire and bend into a heart shape. Hang from a length of gingham ribbon to add to the traditional Shaker feel.



#### PERSONALISED GIFT TAGS

Cut a piece of white air-dry clay (from hobbycraft.co.uk) in half or in a small square and roll to 2-3mm thick. Use a cookie cutter to create the star shapes. Imprint a name with metal letter stamps or handwrite using a pencil. With a darning needle, make a hole at the top. Leave the shapes to air dry for at least 24 hours. Thread a ribbon through the hole and attach the tag to a present.



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## **CHRISTMAS**

Use this handy guide to make sure you have everything perfectly planned so you can enjoy the festivities to the full

#### TUE 24

#### WED 25

Plan a seasonal outing for all the family, such as a candlelit tour of a historic property, to put you in the festive mood

Begin your present list and make a note of which ones will need to be posted

#### MON 30

Plan the menu for the 25th and begin making a 'rolling' foodshopping list, crossing off items

once bought

TUE 01

DECEMBER

Hang up the advent calendar THU 26

Make an advent calendar with small treats picked to suit family members. See our idea on page 4

WED 02

Make mince pies to freeze ahead

> Stock up on storecupboard essentials - eg mixed nuts, olive oil, artisan relishes and cheese crackers

**THU 03** 

SUN 22 NOVEMBER

MON 23

Plan how much festive fizz and any other seasonal tipples you will need and order

Stir-up Sunday: mark this traditional date by preparing a homemade Christmas pudding

SAT 28

SUN 29

Bake the Christmas cake

Visit a local Christmas market to find original gifts and individual decorations

SAT 05

SUN 06

FRI 04

Write a Christmas card list and order or buy for charity designs, try

christmas-cards.org.uk

Work out how many there will be for the main Christmas meal. Order a turkey or goose and a vegetable box to arrive a few days beforehand



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MON 07	naner, ril	ou have enough bbon and pretty r giftwrapping	Check the last posting dates for Christmas at royalmail.com	WED 09	Begin wrapping presents to avoid a last-minute rush	FRI II	Select the Christmas tree and bring it inside
SUN 13		MON 14	TUE 15	WED 16	THU 17	FRI 18	SAT 19
Find the Christ decorations and fairy lights and dressing the ti	nd d start	Buy a box of crackers and put out the family board games. Check that you have a good supply of candles		Gather seasonal greenery to create garlands and wreaths	Make sweets and biscuits to package and give as gifts - see our ideas on page 16		Hang the wreath on your front door
SUN 20		MON 21	TUE 22	WED 23	THU 24	FRI	t's Christmas Day!
Invite friend and neighbo for a Christr drink and ni	ours mas	Finish wrapping the presents and pile		Prepare cranberry relish and bread sauce for the turkey - chill until needed	Hang up the children's stockings		estive greetings from II of us at CL

under clingfilm

them around the tree







#### GINGERBREAD COOKIE KIT

Preparation 15 minutes Makes 25-30 cookies
Fill an attractive jar with the layered cookie mixture, then
attach a biscuit cutter, wooden spoon and a card with
the recipe (right) written in your best handwriting.

#### FOR THE COOKIE MIX

500g plain flour 2 tsp baking powder 185g soft light brown sugar 2 tsp ground ginger 1 tsp each ground

#### cinnamon and ground allspice

Mix two-thirds of the flour with the baking powder, then tip into the jar. Shake gently to level out. Spoon in the brown sugar and roughly level out. Mix together the remaining flour with the spices and pour on top of the sugar.

2 Seal the jar and attach a Christmas-themed biscuit cutter, a wooden spoon and a handwritten label with the following recipe.

#### GINGERBREAD COOKIES

Melt 100g butter in a large pan with 115g golden syrup. Add one large beaten egg, then stir in the cookie mixture. Mix to form a stiff dough. Divide into two pieces, flatten into discs and wrap in clingfilm. Chill for 20 minutes. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Roll out the dough to a 3mm thickness, stamp out shapes with the cookie cutter and transfer to greased baking sheets. Make small holes in the top for threading cotton when baked. Bake for 10-12 minutes until lightly golden. Cool on a wire rack, then dust with icing sugar.

#### MIDWINTER FRUIT SALAD

Preparation 10 minutes, plus steeping
Cooking 20 minutes Makes 1 litre
Stored in a traditional Kilner jar, this keeps well for at least a week in the fridge.

1 litre sweet muscatel wine thinly pared zest and juice of 1 tangerine and 1 lemon 2 cinnamon sticks 1 vanilla pod, split 3 bay leaves 100g granulated sugar 24 dried apricots 12 dried prunes 12 dried figs 50 large raisins 50g dried cherries 50g blanched almonds

Put the wine in a non-reactive pan with the citrus zest and juice, cinnamon sticks, vanilla pod, bay leaves and sugar. Heat, stirring, until the sugar has dissolved completely. Bring to the boil, take off the heat and add all the dried fruit and almonds. Stir, cover and set aside to soak for 24 hours.

2 Strain, returning the liquid to the pan, and discard the zest, spices and bay leaves. Put the drained fruit in one or more clean jars. Boil the spiced wine until well reduced. Pour the syrup over the fruit and cover the jars. When cold, seal and chill until needed.



#### PRESENTATION TIP

Find a wide range of jars and bottles, along with colourful lids and labels, at jamjarshop.com

#### CLEMENTINE AND COINTREAU CURD

Preparation 15 minutes Cooking 25 minutes Makes about 750g

Cover jars of this delicious spread with pretty fabric tops and tie with matching string.

juice and zest 4 large clementines (enough to make 125ml) juice and zest 1 lemon 4 large eggs, beaten 125g golden caster sugar 125g unsalted butter, diced 1 tbsp Cointreau

1 Put all of the ingredients, except the Cointreau, into a heatproof bowl set over a pan of gently simmering water.
Stirring constantly, cook for 20-25 minutes

or so until the curd is very thick and coats the back of a wooden spoon. Stir in the Cointreau. If the mixture curdles (the heat was probably too high), it can be saved by pushing it through a nylon sieve and discarding the lumps. Pot the curd into hot

discarding the lumps.

Pot the curd into hot sterilised jars and seal immediately. Label when cold. It keeps for up to a month; once opened, it should be stored in the fridge and used within a week.

#### **GIFT-WRAPPING TIP**

Source antique silver spoons from charity shops and car-boot fairs throughout the year to add a special touch when giving homemade preserves as gifts.





#### WATER BISCUITS FOR CHEESE

Preparation 20 minutes, plus chilling Cooking
15 minutes Makes 25-30
Homemade biscuits and a carefully chosen selection of cheeses from a good-quality cheesemonger are bound to be well-received. Make a batch of each flavoured biscuit, then box up a selection of all three. A jar of chutney is a pleasing finishing extra.

250g plain flour, plus extra for dusting 1 tsp baking powder 60g lard, diced, plus extra for greasing 2 tbsp poppy seeds or 1 tbsp dried dill or 1 tbsp fennel seeds

1 Lightly grease 2-3 baking sheets. Sift the flour and baking powder into a bowl with ½ tsp salt. Rub in the lard until it looks

- like fine breadcrumbs
   do this in a food
  processor if you prefer.
- 2 Stir in your chosen flavouring of poppy seeds, dill or fennel. Sprinkle over 4-5 tbsp cold water and bring together the mixture with a cutlery knife to form a firm dough. Knead until smooth. Flatten into a disc, wrap in clingfilm and chill for 20 minutes until firm.
- Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured worktop to a thickness of 2mm. Stamp out circles with a 6cm fluted pastry cutter. Prick all over with a fork and transfer to the baking sheets. Bake for 10-15 minutes until the edges are pale golden and crisp. If any biscuits puff up, push down with the back of a spoon. Cool on a wire rack. They will keep for up to two weeks in an airtight container.



#### **FLORENTINES**

Preparation 30 minutes Cooking 50 minutes, plus cooling Makes about 50 These nutty treats are ideal for chocolate-lovers.

55g unsalted butter 90ml double cream 110g golden granulated sugar 110g flaked toasted almonds 110g chopped toasted hazelnuts 110g glacé cherries, chopped 55g candied orange peel, finely chopped finely grated zest of 1 tangerine or clementine ½ tsp ground cinnamon ½ nutmeg, grated 55g plain flour 1/4 tsp salt 250g dark chocolate, broken into pieces

- 1 Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Line two or more baking sheets with baking parchment.
- Put the butter, cream and sugar into a heavy pan and heat slowly, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Bring the mixture to the boil, then remove the pan from the heat and stir in the almonds, hazelnuts, cherries, candied peel, zest, spices, flour and salt.
- 2 Drop small spoonfuls of the mixture onto the prepared trays, spacing them well apart. Use a wet cutlery knife to flatten each Florentine before baking them for 8-10 minutes until they begin to brown at the edges. While they are still warm, transfer to a wire rack and leave until cold.
- Melt the chocolate in a heatproof bowl that has been set over a pan of gently simmering water, stirring a couple of times until melted. Spread the smooth underside of each Florentine with chocolate, then set them back on the racks until the chocolate has set.
- When completely cold, stack them carefully in Cellophane bags, before tying the tops with ribbon.

#### PERFECT PARTNERS

Choose from a great selection of cheeses to go with savoury biscuits at finecheese.co.uk, and find delicious artisan chutneys at nutbournefinefoods.co.uk.

#### GIFTS FROM THE KITCHEN



#### VANILLA AND RASPBERRY RINGS

Preparation 40 minutes, plus chilling Cooking 7 minutes Makes 35-40

Line a cardboard box with greaseproof paper and add a few silver decorations to create a stylish container for these moreish biscuits.

50g butter, plus extra for greasing 85g golden syrup 1 tbsp caster sugar 1 tbsp milk 1 tsp vanilla extract 200g self-raising flour ½ tsp bicarbonate of soda raspberry jam, for filling icing sugar, for dusting

- Melt the butter, golden syrup and sugar in a pan. Add the milk and vanilla.
- 2 Sift the flour and bicar bonate of soda into a large bowl. Pour in the butter mixture. Using a flat-bladed cutlery knife, work together to make a very soft dough. Gently knead together, shape into a disc and wrap in baking parchment. Chill until firm.
- 3 Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Grease two to three baking sheets. Roll out the dough (it will be

- easier if you do this on the baking parchment) to a 3mm thickness.
- 4 Using a 6cm plain or fluted cutter, cut out circles and reroll, if necessary. Set aside some as bases and stamp out stars (about 2½cm diameter) in the centre of the remainder if making sandwich biscuits. If making plain biscuits, cut out the centres with smaller round cutters. Arrange them, spaced well apart, on the baking sheets and bake for 5-7 minutes until lightly golden. Remove from the oven and cool on a wire rack.
- To make the raspberry rings, spread a plain biscuit with jam. Dust the star-holed biscuits with icing sugar. Press on top of the jam. These keep for up to a week in an airtight container.





#### CARAMEL CRUNCH BISCUITS

Preparation 15 minutes Cooking 30 minutes Makes about 55

 $Present\, these\, buttery\, biscuits\, inside\, a\, festive-themed\, container.$ 

400g golden caster sugar 250g salted butter, softened 250g plain flour

First, make the caramel. Lightly oil a non-stick baking sheet. Put 150g of the sugar into a small heavy pan and add 2 tbsp of water. Heat gently, stirring until the sugar has dissolved, then boil rapidly until the hot syrup begins to darken and gives off the unmistakable whiff of caramel. Don't let it darken too much or it will be bitter. Pour the

caramel onto the baking sheet and leave it until cold and brittle.

- 2 Break up the caramel roughly, then reduce it to pieces the size of demerara sugar crystals, using a food processor or pestle and mortar. Set aside.
- 3 Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Line a couple of baking sheets with baking parchment.
- Tream the butter and remaining sugar together until very pale and fluffy. Combine the crushed caramel with the flour and mix well. Stir the flour and caramel into the creamed mixture to create a soft dough.
- Torm teaspoons of the dough into balls and set them well apart on the baking sheets. Bake for 12-15 minutes until the biscuits are golden brown. Leave to firm on the sheets for 5 minutes before transferring to wire racks to cool.

#### PEPPERMINT CREAMS

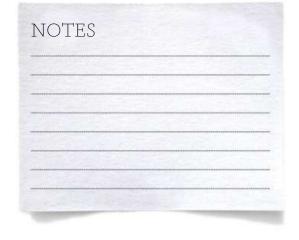
Preparation 30 minutes, plus drying Makes about 50 This simple recipe always goes down well, especially at Christmas. Gild the lily and dip half of each mint into melted dark chocolate if you like, then arrange in a card box on top of a delicate paper doily.

2 medium egg whites 450g icing sugar, sifted few drops of peppermint essence

- Beat the egg whites with a fork until frothy. Put the icing sugar in a bowl and add enough of the egg white to form a stiff dough. Work in a few drops of peppermint essence to taste.
- 2 Turn out onto a worktop dusted with icing sugar and knead until smooth. Roll out to a thickness of 5mm. With a 3-4cm round cutter, stamp out circles and leave to dry for 24 hours on baking parchment dusted with icing sugar. These will keep for up to a month in an airtight container.

PRESENTATION TIP	
deally with a Christmas-themed de	(

Vintage tins, ideally with a Christmas-themed design, make the perfect container for sweet treats. Find a stylish selection on auction sites such as ebay.



#### GIFTS FROM THE KITCHEN

#### ITALIAN MACAROONS

Preparation 35 minutes Cooking 15 minutes Makes 40-45

These biscuits are a softer, chewier version of amaretti. Wrap them in paper twists before packaging.

350g caster sugar 250g ground almonds 40g plain flour 4 large egg whites few drops almond essence zest 1 lemon

- Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan oven) gas mark 4. Line two to three baking sheets with baking parchment.
- 2 Set aside 2 tbsp caster sugar. Put the remaining sugar in a bowl with the almonds and flour. Stir to combine.
- Whisk the egg whites until frothy and lighter in colour but not stiff. Add the almond essence and lemon zest.
- ① Gradually add the almond mixture to the egg whites, a spoonful at a time, until it forms a soft, slightly wet

- mixture that just holds its shape. Leave to sit for 10 minutes to firm up slightly.
- 6 Put teaspoons of the mixture, spaced well apart, on the baking sheets. With a wetted finger, gently shape the tops into slightly rounded domes. Sprinkle with the remaining sugar. Bake the biscuits for 15 minutes until just lightly golden at the edges and they pull away from the parchment easily. Turn off the oven and leave them inside for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire racks to cool.
- 6 Put two macaroons together, smooth sides facing, then wrap in tissue paper and twist the ends. Keep them for up to two weeks in an airtight container.







#### DRIED FRUIT BALLS

Preparation 10 minutes Makes about 20
Easy, quick and full of flavour, these are the perfect present for anyone with a sweet tooth.

100g each of dried apricots and soft prunes
100g mixed raisins, sultanas and currants
50g dried cranberries
50g shelled pistachios finely grated zest of an unwaxed lemon
¼ tsp ground cinnamon pinch of ground cloves

up to 2 tbsp each of honey and ground almonds, as needed 150g granulated sugar

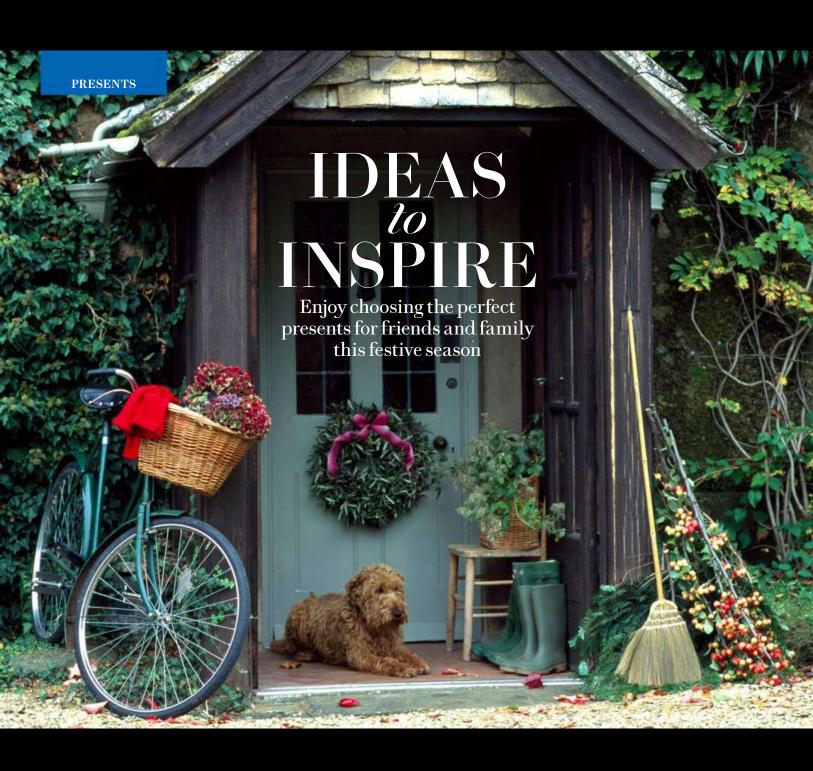
Using a mincer, work the fruit and nuts through the finest blade into a bowl. Sprinkle over the zest, cinnamon and cloves. Mix thoroughly to amalgamate, adding

a little honey if the mixture is too dry or a spoonful or two of ground almonds if it seems too soft and sticky.

2 Put the sugar into a shallow dish. Form small spoonfuls of the fruit mixture into balls by rolling them between your palms. Roll the balls in the sugar, then set them in individual paper cases. They can be eaten at once, or kept for a week or more in an airtight container.



NOTES	
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1 This screen-printed calico zipped bag (16.5cm x 21.5cm) can be used as a purse or small make-up bag, £20, Jenny Sibthorp 2 Women's classic jacket made from pure-wool Harris tweed dyed, spun and woven in the Outer Hebrides, £170, Original Montgomery 3 This hawthorn leaf necklace is handmade in the UK from polished lead-free pewter, £35.50, Glover & Smith

4 Personalise this oak bunting with a child's name using a choice of paint and ribbon colours, from £28/ four flags, Betty & Dodge 5 These machine-washable donut dog beds made in Somerset feature a stylish bone-patterned linen, from £78, Mutts & Hounds 6 Fairweather medium cross-body messenger bag in a new Scottish-woven Glen Etive tweed, £259, Emma Cornes

All items available at shop.countryliving.co.uk

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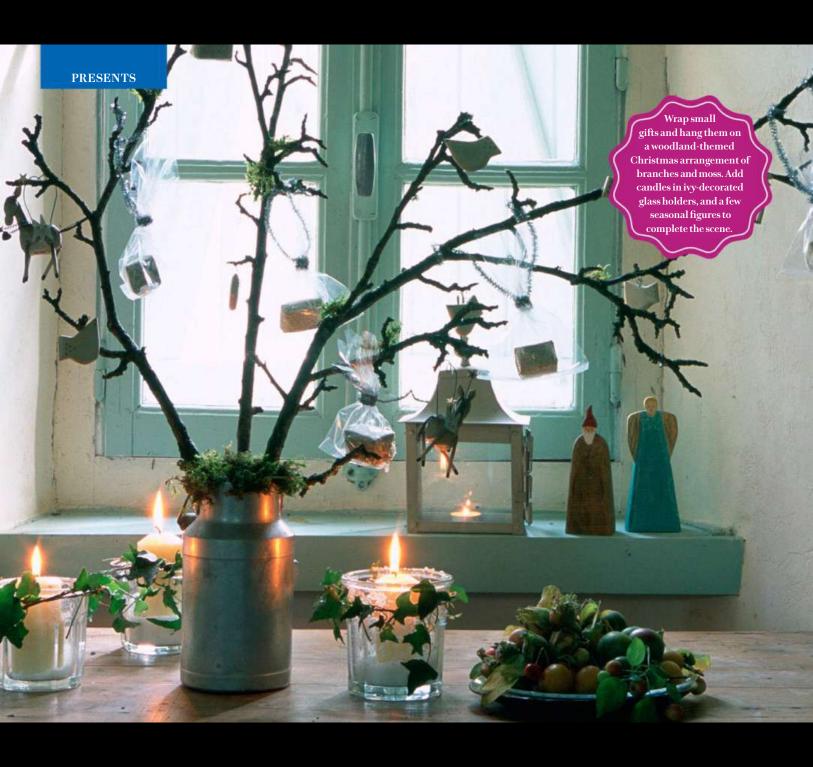




#### GIFT FOR THE GARDENER

This powder-coated steel tin is ideal for storing seeds, bulbs, twine and other planting essentials, £20, Garden Trading







1 This distinctive tea towel, £11, features an illustration taken from an original lino print by British printmaker Angela Harding 2 Piddington Jam makes creatively flavoured preserves, including Strawberry & Pepper, £6, which are a great gift for a foodie 3 Combining beauty and utility, this charming wheel-thrown jug by London-based potter Emily Doran is available in

duck egg and speckled

oatmeal, from £20

4 La De Da Living hand-stamps evocative words and personalised designs onto vintage cutlery, such as this family set of spoons, £42 5 A soft cotton apron with a block-printed-effect pattern is ideal for a keen cook, £25, Hinchcliffe & Barber 6 Engrave a name, special date, place or any wording of your choice onto the sides of a hand-crafted hardwood chopping board, from £59, Make Me Something Special

All items available at shop.countryliving.co.uk

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#### THE FINISHING TOUCH

This rustic wrapping pack has eight decorative kraft papers with coordinating tags, card buttons and 4m of natural twine, £12.99, Razzle Dazzle Rose





1 & 6 Lambswool hat, £55, and scarf, £118, knitted in the Scottish borders, from a new collection by Hilary Grant 2 Child's organic cotton T-shirt with appliquéd rabbit motif in a Liberty fabric, from £16, Coco & Wolf 3 These handmade pure wool sheep are filled with wheat and lavender and can be warmed in the microwave, £36 each, Indigo & Rose

4 A delightful collection of vintage buttons displayed on a wallpapered piece of card – a lovely gift for anyone who likes to sew, £15, Sarah Moore Home 5 This reindeer needlepoint kit contains all you need to make a small cushion with a pom-pom edge (15cm x 15cm without the trim), £19.95, Mad in England

All items available at shop.countryliving.co.uk

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